THE BELL AND THE LIGHT

A
Play with Music

by

Theodore Ward

with

Music
by
Irving Schlein

Based Upon Sketches
from B. A. BOTKIN'S
"LAY MY BURDEN DOWN"

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Lucy Kroll Agency
119 West 57th Street
New York, New York

CHARACTERS

LEAH, a mulatto slave girl
HARDY, her sweetheart
SELENA, her mother
COL. AARON UPSON, slave master
MAHALIA, his wife
HILLIARD)
ADELAIDE) their children

EMMET BURDEN, Adelaide's fiance
UNCLE JERRY, Negro slave leader
TILITA)
NICEY)
LEONARD)
EPPS)
EPHRIAM)
JEB)
SINEY)
HANNAH) Slaves
AMY)
IDA)
FANNY)
JULIA)
BETTY)
SOL)
LEE)
AUCTIONEER
GIRL, a young fugitive

Men, women, youngsters--slaves on the Upson Plantation.

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SETS: 1 Interior, 6 Exterior

Scene	I:	A Kentucky Cave
Scene	II:	TheWell - a barn yard
Scene	III:	Front Porch of the Big House
Scene	IV:	A Clearing
Scene	V:	A Garden Wall

Act II:

Scene	VI:	A Saloon Front
Scene	VII:	A Stockade

ACT I

Scene 1

A cave on the Upson Plantation in Eastern Kentucky.

TIME: Spring, 1860.

A room in a carboniferous cavern, somewhat weird, its stalactites reflecting the light of a burning candle.

Fanning out on the Right are several tunnels indicative of the labyrinth beyond view. But a blanket, hanging across the opening Up Left, suggests that the main stem of the cavern runs along there diagonally.

Rude pieces fashioned from saplings -- a table, a couch, several stools.

A charcoal brazier fashioned out of two metal pails telescoped together, with holes punched below for air, bears an iron pot, and shows a red glow from the fire.

NICEY -- a very old Negro woman in a shawl -- sits beside the brazier, bent over her stick, nursing her old bones in its warmth, as she gazes in reverie.

GIRL -- a pretty young Negro of 18 -- is stretched out on the couch, a blanket across her legs, gazing on the jeweled cones in the ceiling.

Shortly singing is heard outside and GIRL sits up abruptly, listening.

VOICE
(Singing. Outside)
Oh, de ole sheep, dey know de road,
De ole sheep, dey know de road,
De ole sheep, dey know de road----

Nicey
(Lifting refrain)
De young lambs must find de way!
(Rising and turning to Girl)
Git out of sight.

(GIRL runs off Right -- JERRY, a robust black with snow white hair, enters - Bearing a Bull's Eye Lantern)

Jerry
(Dropping blanket behind him)
Hardy come?

Nicey
No. Did he promise?

Jerry
Nicey, I told you it wouldn't do to depend on him.

Nicey
What'd he say?

Jerry
He come up wid the excuse they want him to hep serve the party for the Newly Weds at the Big House tonight.

Nicey
Jerry, you didn't let him get away with it?

Jerry
He scared, Nicey--Scared.-- If we goin get the Gal cross the river, I'm goin have to do it.

Nicey
(Snappily)
Jes drap it! You know the rule. Your job's leadin the travelers to me.

Jerry
(Complainingly)
The dark of the moon won't wait! She's already enterin the First Quarter--After tomorrow night, it's goin be too late!

Nicey
(Thoughtfully)
I spose it's foolish to ask if you heard anything bout Mark?

Jerry
Not a word.

Nicey
How's the white folks actin?

Jerry
If they know anything they don't let on.

Nicey
(Gloomily)
I got a feelin them Pattyrollers bout shot Mark and toss'd his body in the Ohio.

Jerry
I told you, Nicey, the boat's still tied up in the mouth of the cave, same as usual.

Nicey
Tha could be a trap!

Jerry
I don't think so. But I tell you what. I'll go to town tomorrow, and see if Mr. Sinclair can't get one of the freemen to take Mark's place.

Nicey
You reckon the Cunnel ghin you a pass?

Jerry
I'll figure someway to get on the good side of him.

Nicey
All right. You do tha--In the meantime, I'll keep a look out for Hardy. I think he'll take the Gal if he's made of anything more'n shoddy.

Jerry
(Going)
Then I better run on--Tell the Gal I say be of good heart.

Nicey
Good night, Jerry--
(As he exits, she calls)
Gal! You can come out now.

Girl
(In dismay, seeing her alone)
Lawd, Anty, he ain't gone off and left me?

Nicey
Tha wasn't our man.

Girl
(Bitterly, crossing to couch)
Twarn't for tha water, I wouldn't trouble nobody.

Nicey
You mustn't lose courage, Chile.

Girl
You don't know what I been through, Anty--spite of what I showed you.

Nicey
I was born in misery, Chile, and sucked it for my pap.

GIRL
(Surprised)
I thought you said you all here had it easy.

NICEY
Cunnel Upson ain't always been master here at the Dells. He bought this place twenty-five years ago--The man I come up under was so mean he did everythin 'cept eat us! And we had to put up with it, cause in them days us didn't know bout the passageway to the river. All a poor soul could do was come down here and try to hide till the bloodhounds smelled him out---Thank Gawd, tha ole rascal, he in his grave....
(Sighing)
And yet and still, we still ain't free. Ain't many of us understand tha. Seems like folks don't care bout livin on a bended knee till it git raw.

GIRL
Which is to say, I'm sunk?

NICEY
No, Chile. Never. But you got to be patient. The boy I'm tryin to git to set you on free soil, he been spiled. But I reckon we can take a chance on him.

GIRL
I don't trust no pets.

NICEY
Hardy ain't never been known to talk. He's more on the flighty side. They give him to one of the boys when they both wuz chillun, and they growed up like two peas in the same pod. Taught him to read and write, and he can come and go as he please--cause the Pattyrollers all got orders not to fool with him-----

VOICE
(Singing. Outside)
Oh, de ole sheep, dey know de road...

NICEY
(Rising)
Bless Gawd! I reckon thas him.

VOICE
(Singing)
Oh, de ole sheep, dey know de road...

NICEY
Get in the back till I call you.

(Exit GIRL)

VOICE
Oh, de ole sheep, dey know de road --

NICEY
(Going to blanket)
De young lambs must find de way!
(She admits a clean cut young NEGRO wearing his master's cast offs - Bearing Bull's Eye Lantern)
Quick, step inside! Don't want nobody to see the light--Case you was followed.

HARDY
(Suspiciously, glancing around as he comes down)
What've you got to hide? And what's going on down here anyway? Why, it looks like you've moved down here! Couch, table, stove - What the devil is this--And why've you sent for me?

NICEY
You been chosen.

HARDY
Chosen for what--?

NICEY
There's wuk to be done - God's wuk!

HARDY
Come to the pint, Ant Nicey--Just what is this?

NICEY
I got a gal here wants to get cross the river.

HARDY
(Frightened)
You what---?

NICEY
The poor lil thing done come all the way cross the Cumberlands from Tennessee ---

HARDY
Why you must be crazy, old woman!

NICEY
Now don't go flyin off the handle--You got the dark of the moon to shield you. So you can be cross the river and back in a hour---

HARDY
I don't care if it takes ten minutes--

NICEY
Wait, Hardy--I ain't got nobody else I can trust!

HARDY
Well, I'm sorry! But you've picked the wrong man! -- Why I've never been across the Ohio in my life. I don't know a thing about the other side. I'd get caught sure, blundering around over there in the dark.

NICEY
But you can't miss the place! They got a bell and a light over there on the shore to guide you.

HARDY
(Going. He picks up Lantern)
I can't afford it, Ant Nicey---not this!

NICEY
Wait, Son---

HARDY
I'm sorry---

NICEY
(Heading him off)
God made this cave as a refuge for the way-sick and hunted, Son. For twenty years they been finding their way to me, and I got my first time to fail one---

HARDY
(Going)
You managed without me thus far---

NICEY

(Calling, she arrests him)

Gal, come out here.

(To Hardy--playing her trump)

I want you to take a look at this poor chile --

(Crossing behind girl)

She ain't hardly a woman yet. But she's dyin a-thirst for freedom. But tha river's too wide and them currents too strong for her to make it any further alone---

(Lifting the girl's blouse, she turns her about, exposing a web of unhealed wounds from the lash across her back)

Look how they treated her.

Hardy

(Appalled)

My God!

NICEY

You will help her?

HARDY

God, Aunt Nicey--If only I could! But you're asking too much.

NICEY

I don't know what scale you go by, Hardy. But in mine, I has yet to see anything outweigh my brother's freedom.

HARDY

(To Girl)

She doesn't understand, Girl. I can't explain to you. But I'm the last person in the world who could take the chance---

(Going)

I've just got to turn you down, as much as I hate to do so.

(Exit)

NICEY

(Following him up)

You can run! But your conscience goin keep abreast with you!

GIRL

(In despair)

Oh, Anty, this done took all the run out-a me!

(Music begins)

NICEY

(Coming down)

Ain't nothin a human can't bear, Chile, 'cept death. Don't you lose heart--I think he be back--

GIRL
(Singing, bitterly)

Oh, freedom, oh, sweet freedom land
So close and yet so far away--
I ask my brother to hep-a me
He spurn me like a lump of clay!

I don't know why it has to be -
I look but I sure can't see -
All I know's my bubble's burst
And took all the run out-a me!

Old river's wide and the water's cold,
And I sure don't know how to swim --
Like my aching heart of sorrow
It's filled up to the brim!

Oh, I've been beaten to the point of death,
I've had a hard time sure's you born,
But the hardest blow I've ever felt
Was my own brother's scorn!

(The Lights Fade Out)

ACT I

Scene 2

The well.

TIME: The following afternoon.

The well is down-right -- an old-fashioned, canopied type with a rope and windlass with a wooden brass-ringed pail and several drinking gourds.

To the Right of it is a high fence with a ledge three feet above the ground, enabling one to supervise the Stud, which is behind it -- a small corner of the Paddock being shown by its projecting roof.

Midway up, a path, leading off Right, separates the Paddock from the side of the barn -- the latter forming the apex of a triangle, Up-Center, with a portion of its front door showing.

A road, leading off Up-Left, is in front of the barn, with the rear end of a farm wagon showing, the body being hidden by the store house.

The latter is a huge building, the front of which is set on an oblique line running off Down-Left, with a leading platform and broad steps, leading ostensibly to its door, which is only partly visible.

The scene is obviously the favorite meeting place of the slaves of the Upson plantation. And now, as usual in moments of leisure, a crowd of them are gathered -- Only, today being Saturday, several of the older women are engaged with their weekly wash -- the tubs set upon benches near the fence and alongside the barn.

AS THE CURTAIN RISES, LEONARD, a huge young Negro, and TILITA, an attractive Negro girl are the center of attention -- as they perform the age-old ritual of the Satyr and the Nymph, unwittingly.

LEONARD
(Singing -- parodying old slaves secular)
"Saturday night and Sunday too
Tilita on my mind,
Monday morning way 'fore day
Old Master got me gwine.
Tilita, does you love me now?"

CHORUS
(As TILITA evades his embrace)
Tilita, does you love me now?

LEONARD
"Possum up a simmon tree,
Rabbit on the ground,
Lord, Lord, possum,
Shake them simmons down.
Tilita, does you love me now?"

CHORUS
Tilita, does you love me now?

LEONARD
Rabbit up a gum stump,
Possum up a holler,
Get him out, little boy,
And I give you half a dollar,
Tilita, does you love me now?

CHORUS
Tilita, does you love me now?

(The music shifts abruptly)

LEONARD
(Making a dive for the girl)
You teasin' lil devil!

TILITA
(Escaping to platform, then singing, saucily)
What's good girl going to do,

That's the question I'm askin' you,
When there's no way to please
Her Ma and her sweetheart too?
(To Leonard, temptingly)
You say all I do is tease you
Cause I only kiss and squeeze you --
But what more can I do
If what Ma says is true?
(Darting up platform, then to others)
Sometimes he gets so mad
It even makes me sad --
But what more can I do
If what Ma said is true?

(BETTY, her mother, enters during the next stanza)

They ask you to go for a walk
And they say they just want to talk.
Then they see a lil nook
And give you that certain look --
But when you stick to the rule
And tell 'em you ain't no fool --
Why you just a stubborn lil mule!
But what more can you do
If what Ma said is true?

BETTY
(Dropping her bundle of clothes and charging, angrily)
You little hussy! What's the meaning of this?

TILITA
Oh, Lawdy!

BETTY
Come down from there! I'll teach you to sing such mess!

TILITA
Oh, Ma, I was just singing a lil ditty!

BETTY
I'll lil ditty you! I ought to skin you!

TILITA
Lawd, looks like everything I do is wrong.

BETTY
You got the devil, in you, thas why.
(Picking up her clothes)
I never heard such trash!

SINEY
(Another aged about 60)
Oh, Betty, a young gal got to have some fun.

BETTY
(Putting wash in tub)
She's gittin too big for her shift. First thing I know she'll be taking nine months to reduce.

(The CROWD laughs)

HANNAH
(Another in her late 50s, entering)
Any you all seen Nicey?--I come by her cabin to see if she had a piece or two I could rinse out for her, but she ain't home.

BETTY
The Cunnel been missin her too. He asked me 'bout her this mawnin.

SINEY
Nicey bout settin on the bank of the Ohio tryin to catch her a mess of Cat or Buffalo.

AMY
What I want to know is who seen the bride?

LEONARD
She gone, Ma--They left here fore sunup on thar honeymoon.

BETTY
Lawd, tha Massa Greg! He same as the whirlwind.

HANNAH
Ain't it de truf!

AMY
I hear, Lil Miss done finally cotched her a beau.

FANNY
It's true, Ant Amy. They looked for him last night.

AMY
Cora tell me, he from Lexington. Say his folks own a thousand souls!

LEONARD
Oh, Ma. Why don't you womens let them white folks rest?

AMY
I just want to find out. White folks git to marryin, ain't

no tellin who they goin give way in the dowry--Right this minute, they might be plannin on gittin rid of you.

BETTY
Twouldn't be like the Cunnel to give way nobody.

HANNAH
Thas true. Massas like the Cunnel scarce as tusks on a brood sow.

SINKY
You all 'pear to forget; Old Miss got the most say so. We's her property...and don't forgit tha goes for the chillun of everybody she brought here---

(Silence--broken by neighing and kicking of stallion)

Sol
(To Leonard)
You better go in the paddock and see 'bout tha stallion fore he break a leg.

LEONARD
Thas jes ole Brigand's way of tellin me he smell tha filly of McFee, come here in heat this mawnin.

TILITA
(Stretching)
Lawd, I sure wish there was somepen us could do!

BETTY
Oh, you do? Well, you can come right here and start bustin' these suds!

(The CROWD laughs)

Tilita
(Laughing)
Lawd, looks like I put my foot in it again!

JULIA
(Looking Off-Right)
Here come another love bird.

BETTY
Anybody see the indigo?

FANNY
(Simultaneously)
Who, Julia?

(AMY passes indigo)

JULIA
Don't you see Hardy yonder.

FANNY
You reckon him and Leah serious?

TILITA
You ask me, tain't no name for it.

HARDY
(Entering Down-Right)
Hi, everybody--

TILITA
I hear you and Leah fixin to jump the broom?

SINEY
You better say maybe.

TILITA
Lawd, Ant Siney, where you been? Leah can't step out the Big House without fallin in Hardy's arms.

JULIA
Yeah. Old Hardy hang round the kitchen door like Tige waitin' for somebody to toss him a bone!

SINEY
(Laughing)
Well, his mouth may drool, and he might lick his chops. But Leah's one juicy morsel he'll never live to say he cotched!

BETTY
(Pointedly)
Siney, one of these days tha tongue of yours goin take one wag too many!

HARDY
Why--what does she mean, Ant Betty?

BETTY
Never mind. She knows what I'm talkin 'bout.

HARDY
(Interested)
Ant Siney, what is it? Why did you say that?

SINEY
(Evasively)
Ant Siney jes joshin, Son.

LEONARD
(Sotto voce to Amy, his mother)
What dey mean, Ma?

AMY
(Whispering)
The Cunnel's Leah's pappy.

(HE is shocked--But SHE cautions him to be silent)

JERRY
(Entering)
Ah, Hardy! You just the man I want to see.

HARDY
Well, I don't want to see you!

JERRY
(Pulling him Down-Right)
You plannin' on goin to town, ain't you?

SOL
(Indicating pair)
Ugh, oh! - Looks like a certain party up to somepen!

HARDY
(Going along, reluctantly)
I know what you've got on your mind, and the answer is NO!

JERRY
(Whispering)
Don't let on! But Nicey say come there. The gal's cryin herself sick!

HARDY
(Going)
I'm sorry. But I've explained!

TILITA
Where you on your way to, Hardy--

HARDY
I've got work to do---
(He exits into barn)

LEE
Lissen who talkin bout wuk!

LEONARD

(Laughing)
Yeah--Aint tha sompen -- Old Hardy ain't hit er lick since Gawd sent Sunday!

JERRY

(Laughingly, as he stems tide)
Look heah, everybody. I tell you what. You know the Cunnel never rush us cause we just dig in and do the wuk. You know us ain't finish clearin the new ground, and it's gittin late for breakin -- I know this is Saddy. But I tell you what us do. Go to the clearin this afternoon and finish for his sake -- Tha sure make him glad. What you all say?

LEONARD

(Sharply)
Now there's a fool for you!

JERRY

(Laughing)
De ole sheep, dey know de road!

LEONARD

Damn the old sheep, and he got any lil ones, damn them too!

TILITA

(Annoyed)
Oh, Leonard - Us can have a big brush burnin!

LEONARD

(Surprised)
You gals ain't goin?

TILITA

We ain't goin miss---
(Happily)
Us can go rovin all over them woods!

(Music begins)

LEONARD

Damn, I got to saddle the man's horse!

HARDY

(Overhearing, as he re-enters)
Go on, I'll take care of it!

BETTY

What about the wash, Siney?

SINEY
Leave it, Chile. If I know this old man; he got a rabbit up a stump, and I ain't fixin to miss the fun!

TILITA
(Singing, blithely)
Oh, when the wind gets balmy
And I hear that whip-o-will,
I gets a mind for rovin,
And, Lawd, I just can't keep still!

CHORUS
And, Lawd, I just can't keep still!

TILITA
Like popcorn in a skillet
When it begins to pop,
This spring's got me hoppin,
And, Lawd, I just can't stop!

CHORUS
Oh, when the wind gets balmy
And I hear that whip-o-will,
I gets a mind for rovin,
And, Lawd, I just can't keep still!

TILITA
Like some poor soul been sick
And just got out of bed,
This air sets me a-tinglin
And goes right to my head!

CHORUS
And, Lawd, I just can't keep still!

TILITA
I never been on the river,
But if I had a boat,
I'd cut loose with my love
And just lie back and float!

CHORUS
Cause, Lawd, I just can't keep still!

TILITA
I'd float away to nowheres
Just looking up at the sky,
And all I'd ever ask my love
Is to hold me till I die!

CHORUS

I never been on the river
But if I had a boat,
I'd cut loose with my love
And just lie back and float.

TILITA

I'd float away to nowheres,
Just looking up at the sky,
And all I'd ever ask my love
Is to hold me till I die!

JERRY

(Shouting, as he leads them out)

This way, everybody--On to the tool shed, and grab some iron!

CHORUS

(As they drift out)

Oh, when the wind gets balmy
And I hear that whip-o-will,
I gets a mind for rovin,
And, Lawd, I just can't keep still!

(The Lights Fade Out)

ACT I

Scene 3

The porch of the Upson's.

TIME: A few minutes later.

The left end of the porch is partly enclosed with a lattice of creeping vines.

A strip of the garden, with a path leading around both sides of the house. Beside it, on the Left, a portion of a flower bed, where EPHRIAM is seen preparing soil for seedlings.

HILLIARD, the younger son, is seated on porch, in smoking jacket.

HARDY appears on Right.

HARDY

Lil Boss!

HILLIARD

I've been wondering where the devil you were--Where're my boots?

HARDY

I gave them to Cora this morning.

HILLIARD

Oh! -- Well, I'll be needing Sultan shortly-- You'd better tell Leonard to saddle him and Mr. Burden's horse, and bring them around the drive in fifteen or twenty minutes. - I'm going to Ashland, and I guess we'll ride into Raceland together.

HARDY

(Laughing)

Lil Boss, I swear. Looks like you got it bad as me.

HILLIARD

How do you mean?

HARDY
I was hoping I could tell Leah tonight.

(Piano music heard within)

HILLIARD
You mean about your getting married---Well, I haven't spoken to Mama yet.

HARDY
(Disappointed)
But, Lil Boss. You promised me sure last night.

HILLIARD
If I don't catch her right, she'll turn you down--And you wouldn't want that, now would you?

HARDY
God, no--But you know Old Miss likes me.

HILLIARD
Of course--And you have my word. If there's anyway I can get you and Leah together, it'll be done---I think I may be jumping the broom myself one day soon--Maybe.

HARDY
(Overlooking the others doubtfulness)
I've been waiting for you to say that.

HILLIARD
(Smiling)
If I do, you and Leah can come take care of us.

HARDY
(Jubilant)
Can I tell Leah that?

HILLIARD
I don't see why not.

HARDY
(Going)
Well, don't wait, Lil Boss. Make her say YES tonight!
(Exit right)

HILLIARD
(Laughing)
I've a mind to try.

Upson
(Appearing from within--to others over his shoulder)
I'll be right here on the porch--
(He joins Hilliard--himself a man of 50 with a fine physique and a misleadingly congenial disposition)
Looks like we're in for another wedding.

Hilliard
(Misunderstanding)
How'd you guess?

Upson
It's written all over your sister's face.

Hilliard
Oh!---But then, marriage is catching.

Upson
(Expansively)
Your Mama thinks Greg and Sally would be happier in their own home. But I don't agree. The Dells will support twice our number, so long as we continue to practice a little sobriety. - I haven't told Greg yet, but I'm making him overseer. Between that and his share of the earnings from the Stud--which, incidentally, I'm planning to expand--, he should have a sound income--I'm increasing the pasturage to give him room for new ~~kmkmk~~ stock.

Hilliard
How? The marinoes have little enough grass as it stands.

Upson
Oh, I'm cutting thirty acres from this end of the tobacco field, and clearing a like amount of woodland. That way we'll lose nothing in tillable acreage. - But with regard to your case. Have you made up your mind yet?

Hilliard
Why the rush? I've until fall.

Upson
You've got to go back to school. You'll never make a planter.

Hilliard
Frankly, Papa, I'm thinking of going West.

Upson
Now you're talking like a numbskull! You'll need an education no matter where you go. But your opportunity is here where I and your friends can help you--I've not understood why you came home so suddenly, and I don't intend to pry. But if you don't care to return to Lexington, I suggest you enter Knoxville and read for the bar. In a year or two, you may go on to Harvard.

Hilliard
I'm not interested in the bar, Sir.

Upson
Then what are you interested in?

Hilliard
Frankly, nothing.

Upson
What?

Hilliard
It's all a farce, Papa--seeing what we're heading into.

Upson
Do you mean politically?

Hilliard
Exactly. I expect the worse tomorrow.

Upson
So you stupidly conclude, the less preparation you have the better. Is that why you're back?

Hilliard
They're teaching a batch of lies down there, Papa.

Upson
What sort of lies? Explain yourself.

Hilliard
It's the way they interpret everything--I don't know a single principle you hold, for example, that I haven't heard assaulted by one Jack-leg on the faculy or another.--But you'd better not open your mouth. If you do, you're held up to ridicule, and forced to run the gauntlet of the ignorant bullies they've got down there, swaggering all over the campus!

Upson
(Darkly)
I see you went down there and made yourself a nuisance!

Hilliard
(Sharply)
What was I supposed to do, swallow everything?

Upson
A sensible student accepts what he's being taught, Boy! He keeps his opinions to himself until he'searned the right to speak!

Hilliard
But what if it turns out to be too late, and he has to shed his blood?

Upson

Bah! Things'll never come to that.

Hilliard

Sir, you're not omniscient. Furthermore, you admit slavery's not good. In fact, all any one needs to do is take a trip down the Ohio and look at the other shore to see how things stand. Everytown you pass over there shows how they've prospered on free labor, and are steadily forging ahead; while for us things are growing steadily worse--Yet, we're asking for a showdown--Indeed, seem determined to have it, especially since that speech of this man Lincoln at Cooper Union.

Upson

Shucks, Son! There wasn't a word in it, from beginning to end, to justify all the excitement.

Hilliard

There'll be trouble if he gets the nomination.

Upson

(Affably)

You mustn't judge by the panic mongers, my boy. Abraham Lincoln's a free-soiler--born right here in Kentucky I hear--He understands our problem, and there isn't a prominent man among us who doesn't see that. What he had to say only went to prove the Founding Fathers desired restriction.

Hilliard

But the planters are convinced that's equivalent to death!

Upson

What planters--the lunatics?...It's no expansion we need, but conservation and less greed. There's room enough. All sensible men knowthat.- It's this mad gluttony for the Almighty dollar that's driving us to the edge of the precipice--the fools, who insist on doubling the Nigras' tasks--They can't see all they're doing is arousing public sentiment against us and providing license for such bandits as this man, John Brown, and his ilk to come among us and stir up rebellion---That's why I've been so in hope you'd finish school--so you could join the ranks of those of us who're trying to damn up the tide and help work out a sande solution. Instead, I find you ready to panic and fly out West!

Hilliard

There's talk of going out, Papa, and sentiment enough to swing, unless something drastic is done at once.

Upson

Good sense will prevail, my boy. Rely upon it.

Hilliard
But what if it doesn't, and you find yourselves alone?

Upson
What do you mean--In what way?

Hilliard
Around Lexington, Papa, the mechanics and operatives are swearing they're not going to lift a finger to help you if it comes to war!

Upson
I tell you there won't be any way.

Hilliard
Why risk it? You hold slavery is wrong. Why can't you and your friends start a movement to free the Nigras and pay them wages?

Upson
That's out of the question, Son.

Hilliard
Are you thinking of the cost?

Upson
No.--It's no joke, of course, knowing all you own is tied up in human flesh with no way to liquidate.--But the trouble lies deeper. As you've said, there's no question but free labor is best. As a matter of fact, I don't know an intelligent master who wouldn't be willing to free his Nigras in the morning, if only it could be done with safety.

Hilliard
What do you mean "safety?"

Upson
(Regretfully)
We can't ship em back to Africa, Son--There's too many of em--And we don't dare turn them loose in the midsts of a nation of free men, and still expect them to accept anything less than their full rights.

Hilliard
But, Papa, right is right!

Upson
Would you have Adelaide marry a Nigra?

Hilliard
(Barking)
Ha! I wonder!

Upson
Are you trying to be sarcastic?

Hilliard
That's an old canard, Sir, and I suspect what it really means ishow would I like it if we had to get out, you and I, and earn our own living:

Upson
(Angrily)
You dare impugn my motives?

Hilliard
(Sharply)
you're not being consistent:

Upson
(Towering above him)
you insolent pup: You're talking like a damned Abolitionist:

Hilliard
What about Justice, Papa? What about that?

Upson
Who're you to judge?

Hilliard
It's not fair to the Nigras, and you know it:

Upson
When've you heard me deny that?--
(Walking about)
Of course itas not fair. I'd be the last to say otherwise.
(Turning back)
But we also owe something to our own. XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX
We've a duty to the white race to spare it from mongrelization:

Hilliard
Sir, you're talking like Professor Herford down at Transylvania--as though history cared a tinker's damn, and right a mere dodad that shifts like the cock on the lightning rod above the barn with every change in the wind:

Upson
(Grimly)
Get out of my face, Hilliard--Go, before you make me lose my digestion:

Hilliard
(Going)
All right: Have ityour way. But don't think I'm going to lay down my life because of any stupid fear of miscegenation:

Burden
(Blocking himx at door, as he himself emerges with MAHALIA, ADELAIDE--
He is laughing easily--a young man in his early 20s)
My taste for bourbon, Madam, is a disgrace to Kentucky--
(To Hilliard)

But I do have a very bad habit of craving cigars.

Hilliard
Perhaps, Papa can help you---

Upson
(Preoccupied)
Eh?-How was that?

Mahalia
Mr. Burden would like a cigar.
(She is still a great beauty though nearing 50--a woman serene above a core of bitterness and great resolution)

Upson
Of course---
(Taking out cigar)
You may enjoy this.

Burden
(Accepting cigar)
Thank you, Sir. I'm certain of it.

Hilliard
(To Emmet)
I've ordered your horse, and I'll be ready in a moment or two.

Burden
Thanks--Whenever you are, Sir.

(Exit HILLIARD within)
(EPHRIAM, the Negro gardener disappears Off-Left)

Adelaide
(A pretty youngster of 18, with a trace of affectation)
It's papa's own leaf.

Burden
(Sampling cigar)
It's quite mild.

Upson
It's my method of curing--plus the fact one of my Nigras is particularly good at rolling them just loose enough for a smooth draw.

Burden)
Colonel, you should train all your Nigras to make cigars. You'd soon have a great fortune.

Mahalia
(Laughing cynically)
I'm afraid, Mr. Burden, you're talking to the one planter in all of Greenup County who doesn't care for making money.

Burden
Madam, are you suggesting that the Colonel is eccentric, or scared of being arrested for counterfeiting?

Mahalia
Neither, Sir. I think he's what's known as a liberal.

UPSON
She means, I don't believe in beating and selling my Nigras.

BURDEN
Really, Sir? Then what do you do about the problem of supply and control?

UPSON
Contented families breed well, and there's no loss from infanticide--On the other hand, I let them know I think if a Nigra won't follow orders by kind treatment, he's wrong in the head and not worth keeping.

BURDEN
And they behave themselves on that account?

UPSON
I'll tell you, Sir, like I tell my boys. You're free to correct them for their own good and make them work right. But you'd better not cut their hides or draw blood!

ADELAIDE
Emmet, do you believe in pettying your Nigras?

(Far off, the NEGROES are heard shouting merrily)

BURDEN
(Glancing at Mahalia)
Unfortunately, Adelaide; I've spent so much time abroad, I hardly know how I feel toward them.

MAHALIA
I admire your tact, though I wouldn't blame you if you went back to Lexington thinking us really outlandish--
(Waving her hand toward the woods)
Just listen to them whooping and hollowing this time of day--
Aaron, what do you suppose they can be up to?

UPSON
I thought I heard the ring of an axe.

ADELAIDE
But, Papa, it's Saturday--
(To Burden)
Our Nigras never work Saturday afternoons.

UPSON
(Rising)
I think I'll run out there and see what's going on--

(To Burden)
I'm sorry you're leaving, or I'd ask you to come along.

BURDEN
I should've liked nothing better--
(He rises to shake hands)
It would've given me an opportunity to see how your philosophy works in practice---

(HILLIARD emerges)

(Laughing)
Though I must say, I wouldn't be surprised if you discovered, they've stolen one of your shoats and are roasting it for barbecue!

UPSON
(Going amid laughter)
You couldn't pay one of my Nigras to be that dumb!

(Exit Off-Left, where EPHRIAM reappears with LEAH, who has helped him by bearing a basket of seedlings and now stands waiting for him to take them as he gets rid of his own burden---UPSON nods to them as he disappears--and she is seen to be a beautiful mulatto, wearing an afternoon frock)

HILLIARD
(To Emmet)
You're obviously having such a good time, I hate to remind you it's time we were off.

BURDEN
(Pulling watch and seeing time)
That so---? Good Lord!
(Crossing to the Right of Mahalia)
Madam, I don't know how to thank you for your gracious hospitality and in the same breath convey my regrets---
(Seeing Leah, he breaks off in the middle of his sentence and begins staring at her)

MAHALIA
Say no more--We quite understand---

HILLIARD
(Going)
I'll be in the driveway.
(Exit Off-Left)

MAHALIA

(Running on--oblivious of Burden's distraction)

You must come again as soon as your Mama is better. And I want you to tell her I said I want her to make a quick recovery. Because I'm looking forward to seeing----

(Noticing he isn't listening, she glances around and, seeing Leah, blanches. Darting a glance at Adelaide, hesitates, and then attempts to go on--as her daughter, catching her glance, turns to look and also reddens)

I er really want you all to come...and spend some time with us. But I don't want you to...er wait for an invita----

(Her sense of mortification prevents her from going on, and she addresses him sharply)

Really, Mr. Burden! I don't think you've heard a word I've said!

(LEAH hands Ephriam basket)

BURDEN

(Too preoccupied to realize his situation, he turns with a smile)

(Exit LEAH)

Oh, I beg your pardon, Madam--But who was that pretty girl?

ADELAIDE

(Angrily)

Who--My maid?

(Laughing nervously)

She <u>is</u> a cute little Nigra wench, isn't she?

BURDEN

(Stammering)

I'm...I'm sorry. I meant to say ODD.

MAHALIA

(Recovering her poise)

Run along, Sir. Kentucky is famous for its beautiful women, so you shouldn't be surprised if a little of ours rubs off on our Nigras now and then.

BURDEN

(Contritely--Beating a retreat)

You are too gracious, Madam--Good day!

(Exit BURDEN)

MAHALIA

Good day! And don't forget to come again and bring Mrs. Burden--

(She motions to Adelaide to snap out of it)

Pull yourself together, and remember your manners!

ADELAIDE

I won't.

MAHALIA

Where's your dignity? Do as I say!

ADELAIDE

(Obeying, she steps to end of porch to call weakly)

Goodbye!

(He is heard replying, as she turns to her mother in tears)

Oh, Mama. I was never so insulted in my life!

MAHALIA

(Preoccupiedly)

It was mortifying, to say the least----

ADELAIDE

And the effrontery, Mama--How could he be so brazen?

MAHALIA

It's a taste, my dear, of what you must expect!

ADELAIDE

But he seemed such a gentleman!

MAHALIA

They're all lechers behind our backs, and they think keeping a mistress is their natural right. He simply dropped his guard for a moment.

ADELAIDE

I'll not have anymore to do with him.

MAHALIA

Don't be a fool!--He's proposed, and it's clear he's fond of you. He'd not have come all the way from Lexington to apologize for his absence last night, if he were not. The wise thing is to let this be a warning to you, and in future keep your eyes open, and be <u>ready</u> if you're to keep your self-respect.

ADELAIDE

(Indignantly)
It's that sneaky Leah! It's all her fault!
(Angrily)
And, Mama, I insist she must be punished, severely!

MAHALIA

I intend to.

ADELAIDE

Nobody can come in this house without her flaunting herself in their face. She does it deliberately, Mama. She does! I know. She doesn't like me. And she thinks she's pretty with her yellow face!

MAHALIA

(Bitterly)
I've been asleep--a fool, and allowed us both to be imposed upon. I've tolerated the wench, thinking I had her under my thumb, when I should've gotten rid of her years ago! -- Oh, to think I even toyed with notion of giving her to you-- of literally planting her in your home, as though I had some wicked desire to ruin your life!

ADELAIDE

(Startled)
How do you mean, Mama?

MAHALIA

(Preoccupiedly)
Luckily, it's not too late!

ADELAIDE

But, Mama, I don't understand.

MAHALIA

(Sharply)
Never mind. There are some things best left unexplained. Let it be sufficient, when I say I'm going to get rid of her.

(EPHRIAM pricks up his ears)

ADELAIDE

(Surprised)
Get rid of her --?

MAHALIA

Yes.

ADELAIDE
You mean you're going to send her to the field, like the others?

MAHALIA
I mean I'm going to put her on the block!

ADELAIDE
(Frightened, but excited)
Now you're talking, Mama!

MAHALIA
I'll not have the yellow wench playing the part of <u>your</u> rival!

ADELAIDE
(Venomously)
That's just what she's been trying to do, Mama. Why she actually thinks she's my equal! She's jealous of me! And she's just as envious as she can be. I've told you how she sasses me!

MAHALIA
Enough. As soon as I can make arrangements, I'll put a stop to it forever.

ADELAIDE
She needs to be taught a lesson. Selling's too good for her!

MAHALIA
Say no more! You know my plans. But they mustn't be disclosed.

ADELAIDE
Oh, I won't, Mama. I won't breathe a word.

MAHALIA
See that you don't. Until I can send her to Raceland, nothing of this must reach your Papa's ears.

ADELAIDE
I understand, Mama--

MAHALIA
I want you to be particularly careful you don't let on to her!

ADELAIDE
She can't pick me.

MAHALIA
It's not a matter of just what you may say. She's a shrewd, calculating wench. She may catch on, if she sees you acting like the cat that ate the mouse. By Monday or Tuesday, I should have her on the block!

(EPHRIAM is seen slipping away, as the lights dimout)

DIM OUT

ACT I

Scene 4

The clearing.

TIME: A few minutes later.

Against a background of woods, with a plot of underbrush on the right, JERRY and five others, including SOL are seen sawing sections of a log in pairs.

Off left, there is the cheery laughter of the youngsters.

JERRY
(Leading the men in song)

Hi, ho, ug!
Hi, ho, ug!
The sharp bit,
The strong arm!
Hi, ho, ug!
Hi, ho, ug!
This tree am done
'Fore us is warm!

Hi, ho, ug!
Hi, ho, ug!
I tell you
One thing, Misters!
Hi, ho, ug!
Hi, ho, ug!
Life is short
And full of blisters!

Hi, ho, ug!
Hi, ho, ug! --

(Leading the others, the YOUNGSTERS enter to catch Jerry and his gang as they sit down)

JERRY
Hell, I'm tiahd! Les rest!

LEONARD
(As he and others enter)
What! Don't tell me, you all done played out?

LEE
Hell, Unk Jerry say he didn't come out heah to kill hisself!

SOL
(Innocently)
You all must be forgittin' this is Saddy -- Uncle Jerry got him a lil sparkin' to do!

HANNAH
(Catching on)
Tonight might be Saddy night. But when folks gets grey they likes their sleep, ain't that right, Jerry?

JERRY
You can't witness by me!

SOL
(Laughing)
Not long's they got jugs for sale!

LEONARD
(Playing dumb)
Whatchu mean, Uncle Sol?

SOL
You seed him whisperin' to Hardy, didn't you?

LEONARD
Oh! so that's how come they whisperin'? Unk Jerry fixin' to git him a jug, 'cause he got some tall cotin to do fore mawnin!

LEE
(Drily)
Man ain't spry got to do sompen!

SOL
He do better seein if he can't git Leonard to gin him a pinch o' the Cunnel's Spanish fly!

JERRY
Shucks! You young saplins! -- You all don't know -- You ain't never heard bout black berry juice!

(Music begins)

Am I tellin em right, Siney?

SINEY
You old rascal. You better go way from here! You ain't foolin nobody. Your days been numbered! I ain't sayin nothin 'bout your nights!

JERRY

How you talk? Why, woman, I'm thinkin bout askin the Gunnel to pick me out somebody young so I kin jump the broom agin!

AMY

Lawd, the devil!

JERRY

(Cutting a step and singing, rambunctiously)

Oh, I'm a regular ram!
I don't need no dram --
You see me old but frisky.
You think I'm full of whiskey.
But I know the secret of keeping spruce:
The blacker the berry the sweeter the juice!

CHORUS

Oh,he's a regular ram!
He don't need no dram --
You see him old but frisky,
You think he's full of whiskey.
But he know the secret of keeping spruce:
The blacker the berry the sweeter the juice!

JERRY

Now Sol'mon had him
A thousand wives
You couldn't part
For the sake of their lives --
Course some folks think
Cause he was old
It surely must
A-been his gold
That kept all them
Sweet womens happy,
A-smilin' and callin'
Him "Sweet Pappy!"
But if you know
Your Bible hist'ry,
There's nothin a-tall
To the myst'ry!

CHORUS

Oh, he's a regular ram!
He don't need no dram --
You see him old but frisky,
You think he's full of whiskey.
But he know the secret of keeping spruce:
The blacker the berry the sweeter the juice!

JERRY

Old Sol'mon was rich
But that sly old rooster
He been to Afika
And got him a booster!
Yes, Siree!

That's why he never
Call for the sherry
To help him keep
Them womens merry!
When Sol'mon got
To feelin weary,
You'd hear him yell:
"Whar my black berry?"
When while the gals
Cut the pigeon wing,
You'd hear tha dog
Begin to sing:

(UPSON enters but they are all too engrossed to notice)

Oh, some think womens who's pink and white
Must certainly be the world's delight.
Some think nothing on the earth's so fair,
As a yaller gal with long black hair.
The rest say a Brown is Pure-D honey,
But as for me I'll stake my money:
My lil Sheba is the livin proof;
The blacker the berry the sweeter the juice!

CEDRUS

Oh, he's a regular ram!
He don't need no dram --
You see him old but frisky,
You think he's full of whiskey.
But he knows the secret of keeping spruce:
The blacker the berry the sweeter the juice!

JERRY

(Seeing Upson and feigning fear)

Oh, Massa Cunnel, please don't whip us for cuttin down your trees --

UPSON

(As THEY all turn -- smiling)

I'm going to whip you. I'm going to whip you all right.
I'm going to whip you all with chicken stew!

(Music begins)

CROWD

Lawd, chicken stew!
Ain't that sompen!
The Cunnel goin whip us with chicken stew!

UPSON
(Singing satirically)
I might not be like Solomon,
The wisest ever born,
But if there's one thing I profess
It's how to make a home!

You are my children, don't you see,
That's why we get along.
I never had a dollar but what
You all could call your own!

Of course, the planters call me crazy,
But they don't understand
How you can be my slaves, and yet
Be just my fellowman!

I don't care what they think or call me
Cause I'm a friend to you!
We'll go on pulling right together
And feeding on chicken stew!

CROWD
(Hilariously)
Lawdy, he mean it too!
When, Cunnel?
Yeah, Cunnel, when?

UPSON
Tonight!

CROWD
Tonight--?

UPSON
Yes. I intended to let you celebrate last night to make the bride welcome. But you know your Master Greg. He rushed so, we didn't get a chance to plan anything--And before day this morning, he lit out again--Him and the bride's gone to Niagra--But we'll celebrate without them, and wish them well!

JERRY
Amen!

CROWD
(Agreeing)
Ad libs.

UPSON
I'm going back now. But I'm going to give orders about the chickens. Some of you older women will have to chip in and help Cora -- But tonight, we'll celebrate!

(The older folk follow him out)

(Music begins)

CROWD

Ad libs.

TILITA

(Singing, as she cuts a step, blithely and the YOUNGSTERS dance)

Sue, she went out to the clearin
In the woods one night.
The banjo was-or ringin
And the moon wuz shinin bright -
Folks dey wuz er clappin
And stompin round the ring,
When Sue her and Joe Brown 'gin
To shake tha thing!

Oh, first they did the "Bump-er-round!"
Then they did the "Lazy Swallow!"
But when they come to the "Break-down,"
That gal she had to holler!
Oh, no, now!

CHORUS

Oh, no, now!

TILITA

Lawd, the moon went down
And the day was getting bright,
But Sue she told Joe Brown
"Baby, hold me tight!"
Then she got way back
And did the easy roll,
While Joe jes quivered so
He send your very soul!

CHORUS

Oh, no, now!

TILITA

Lawd, I heard her whisper,
As they wilted to the ground,
"Please don't stop now baby,
Let's make it one more round!"

(The lights fade out as the dance continues)

ACT I

Scene 5

The Nook By the Garden Wall with Bench.

TIME: The same.

LEAH and HARDY seen entering. In the distance the voices of the others singing.

LEAH

(Halting, she picks leaf from evergreen bush--Petulantly)

Oh, Hardy, don't tease me! Tell me!

HARDY

I spoke to Lil Boss, and he's going to make Old Miss let us get married.

LEAH

(Suddenly grim)

And then what--?

HARDY

Why he's going to jump the broom with one of the Bushnell girls. Then we can go live with them.

LEAH

(Unhappily)

Yes--As butler and maid!

HARDY

(Shocked)

Why, Darling--You said that like you don't love me.

LEAH

(Softening)

Our love's got nothing to do with it, Silly--It's them.

HARDY

(Laughing)

The devil with them. Your love is all that counts, precious. You're all I think about, all I dream about. I carry you in my bosom like I do my soul--And we're going to be happy, Honey--I haven't got the words to make you know it, though they're on the tip of my tongue---

(Music begins)

LEAH

(Moved)
Oh, you don't need to say anything, Sweetheart, I feel the same way about you.

HARDY

(Singing)
There's a song on the tip of my tongue,
Mocking me, as they say,
And it's all about you and my hopes,
Haunting me night and day!

Like a dream you strive to remember,
Hovering, vaguely in mind--
I use allmy might to recall it,
Leaving the best behind!
(Drawing her close)
Yet, I know by all that's holy,
Holding you as I do,
Every muscle and bone in my body's
Aching with love of you!

Oh, I can't do more than swear the
Homage I bear so true,
But if I had the voice of an angel
Glory would shine on you!

LEAH

Though I feel your strong arms around me--
Trembling, I'm like a child.
Though I know all true love is holy,
Quaking, my heart runs wild!

But the song on the tip of my tongue,
Bending me to your will,
Seems a breath of the spring wind blowing,
Bidding my heart be still!

(They embrace)

LEAH

(Suddenly pulling away)
Good Lord, I forgot!

HARDY

Forgot what?

LEAH

(Looking toward house)
Old Miss may see us!

HARDY
(Trying to embrace her again)
The devil with Old Miss.

LEAH
No. Don't. Please. She saw you kissing me last night.

HARDY
What if she did? It's no crime!

LEAH
No. But she insulted me!

HARDY
Because I kissed you?

LEAH
Yes. She called me a low, nasty wench!

HARDY
(Outdone)
Well, for Christ's sake--But she must've misunderstood.

LEAH
She saw very well.

HARDY
Well, this beats me.

LEAH
(Chuckling--ironically)
Isn't it something---?

HARDY
It sure God is--And yet, I figured she thought more of us!

LEAH
Oh, yeah?

HARDY
Look how she let us learn to read and write along with the children.

LEAH
(Quietly)
That wasn't her doings, Hardy. It was the Colonel's.

HARDY
(Snapping out of it)
Well, the devil with her. You'll feel better after the party tonight.

LEAH

I'm not going.

HARDY

Oh, Leah--!

LEAH

I'm not going to stoop and ask her permission.

HARDY

(Laughing)
Hell, I'll ask the Old Biddy myself.

LEAH

(Annoyed)
If you do, I won't speak to you again.

HARDY

Oh, Honey, you're way off--I laugh in their face, and twist em all around my finger!

LEAH

You're still a slave!

HARDY

I don't consider Lil Boss my master. He's my friend.

LEAH

Then why doesn't he free you and prove it?

HARDY

Maybe he would if I asked him.

LEAH

Oh, sure!

HARDY

I've seen how the freemen live! Why outside of Mr. Sinclair, who runs the harness shop in Raceland, and one or two others, the freemen exist like tobacco plants full of split worm.

LEAH

I don't believe it--
(Suddenly sharply)
And to tell you the truth, Hardy, you really surprise me!

HARDY

How?

LEAH

All this lack of spirit!

HARDY
(Indignantly)
Why I like that!--Because I tell you the truth, and don't go around with my lips poked out?

LEAH
(Harshly)
I thought you were different! I thought we could find a way out of this mess!

HARDY
What d' you mean?

LEAH
You know very well what I mean.

HARDY
(Perturbed)
Good Lord, Leah, I never dreamed you felt this way--But, shucks! if you thinkit'll make you happy. Hell, just say so, and I'll take you away.

LEAH
I'm not joking, Hardy.

HARDY
Neither am I.

LEAH
How could you?

HARDY
I know a way. I just found out about it last night.
(Glancing around, then sotto voce)
They've a girl here I was asked to take across to Hanging Rock--

LEAH
Take her how?

HARDY
By boat. They say they've got a bell and a light over there---

LEAH
(Excited)
Oh, I've heard them whisper about the bell and the light.

HARDY
They claim they've friends over there--part of the Underground, I suppose.

LEAH
Do Jesus! Who all's in it here?

HARDY
I don't know--outside of Nicey and Uncle Jerry.

LEAH
And what about the girl--?

HARDY
She's hidden in the cave.

LEAH
I meant, are you going to take her?

HARDY
Of course not.

LEAH
Oh, Hardy--You didn't refuse!

HARDY
You know the family trusts me!

(Music begins)

LEAH
Oh, Hardy--How could you?

HARDY
(Singing)
It may look bad, to tell the truth,
But good sense plainly shows
A man can't be a weather-cock
For every wind that blows.

I'd be a fool to stick my neck out,
And run smack into danger,
Just cause I feel some sympathy
For every helpless stranger.

The time ain't ripe for rising up,
Or trying to be a hero,
You got to look out for yourself,
Else you'll soon be zero.

I reckon I love my brother
As much as any man.
But brother or no brother
(You've got to understand),
I can't ruin my future
Just cause I'm asked to take a stand!

Slavery's tough as a hickory,
It's hard as hard can be--
Just lopping off a limb or two
Will never kill the tree!

Much more, I love you so, dear,
I'd rather be a slave
Than run the risk of losing you
This side of the grave!

LEAH
(Coldly)
You belong to the Upsons, Hardy, body and soul. You've let them pickle you, like the others back there in the woods shouting hallelujah!

HARDY
Shucks. You've just let Old Miss make you bitter.

LEAH
You mean I've let her open my eyes!

HARDY
But I've told you. We'll leave tonight, if you say so.

LEAH
(Bitterly)
What's the use? It's plain we'd never be happy together.

HARDY
(Suspiciously, after a moment)
Siney said my lips may drool and I might lick my chops, but I'd never live to get you--What'd she mean by that?

LEAH
(After a moment)
That the Colonel would object, I guess.

HARDY
But why should he?

LEAH
He's hypocrit enough.

HARDY
I don't get it.

LEAH
Look, Hardy. It's time you knew, if you haven't guessed--
Not that I care anything about him or the family either--
God knows I'd rather be dead than live like the leeches they are. But I've my rights too!

(Indignantly)
This land, that house, and everything in it belongs as much to me as it does the rest--Yet, I have to wait on my own brothers and sister!

HARDY
Your brothers and sister-----You mean----

LEAH
He's my father!

HARDY
(Shocked)
The Colonel? Well, I'll be damned! Yet, I should've known.

LEAH
You and anyone else.

HARDY
I don't blame you for wanting to go--And I'll take you, Leah. Anytime you say!

LEAH
No, Hardy. I couldn't trust myself with a man of your spirit.

(Music begins)

HARDY
You still want me to take the Girl, is that it?

LEAH
That's just part of it.

HARDY
(Desperately)
For Christ's sake, Leah. You swore you loved me. Yet you're ready to break us up--Surely, you must see the time isn't ripe for what you're thinking about?

LEAH
(Singing)
Oh, tell me not the time's not ripe
As though it grew upon a tree,
And all we need to do is wait
For this fruit called liberty!

As the old folks used to whisper
When they spoke of being free,
There's a bell and a light a-burning
And sounding clear somewhere for me!

I cannot wait or be contented
When the bell is calling me,
And the light of freedom beckons:
Lift your head and come to me!

I know as surely as I live
No one was born to master me,
And the time we spend in bleating
Only prolongs my slavery.

So tell me not the time's not ripe,
As though it grew upon a tree,
And all we need to do is wait
For this fruit called liberty!

As the old folks used to whisper
When they spoke of being free,
There's a bell and a light a-burning
And sounding clear somewhere for me!

Yes, and I intend to answer
Though it cost the life of me,
For I've felt the urge for freedom
And content I cannot be!
(Turning, she goes out swiftly)

HARDY
(Calling to her)
I'll take her, Leah! You have my word!

(BLACKOUT)

ACT I

Scene 6

The well.

TIME: That evening.

It is the dark of the moon, and the stars provide only a cold light, seeming to focus the gloom with which the NEGROES are shrouded as they sit about, contemplating the impending sale of Leah.

TILITA
I thought when the Cunell come back there to the clearin and told us he wuz goin whip us with chicken stew, thiswas goin be one more night.

SINEY
Tiz one more night -- but not the kind we been lookin for.

(Silence)

FANNY
I wonder if Leah know.

SINEY
Ephriam, you tell her?

EPHRIAM
(Slowly)
I ain't seen the gal since she went by the porch, and that man started this mess.

TILITA
If I was Leah and they did sompen like this to me, I'd kill myself.

LEONARD
What somebody ought to do; long bout midnight is douse tha Big House with coal ile and burn up every damn one of them bastards!

AMY
(Strides across swiftly, and slaps)
Maybe that teach you to keep your fool mouth shet!

(Silence)

FANNY
I wonder how Hardy's going to feel?

JULIA
Lawd, thas right!

TILITA
Tain't hard to guess, crazy as he is bout Leah.

LEE
Where is Hardy anyhow?

TILITA
I speck he went to town.

LEONARD
No. His horse still in the stable.

SOL
(After a moment)
The Cunnel told me us never need to worry. He say the Dells wuz our home, and us wuz jes one big family. But us owed it to oursefs to work hard and do our best to make good crops for him. So then when times git hard, he'd have a dollar to take care of us so we wouldn't have to suffer--- Now looks like Old Miss done had a change of heart, and us been listenin to jes talk.

AMY
Like Ma used to say: We have to bear all; cause thas all we can do.

SINEY
I been lookin for sompen like this, mysef.

HANNAH
Yeah. But thas a woman for you, Chile. They wait a long time. But they don't forget...Selena, she settin yonder in the dar, cryin her heart out. Can't see nothin but the bitter, briney days ahead! -- And why? Tain't like the family needin the money. But, all, jes cause some live in the clouds and can't get over the fact us is human same as they is, and all men folks is dogs!

(SILENCE. Music begins)

TILITA
(Lifting the illusive melody, strangely disquieting as an admixture of Blues and Spirituals)
I dreamed last night about

Sad-mouthed Lulu Belle.
She fed her baby poison--
God save her soul from hell!

CHORUS
I dreamed last night about
Sad-mouthed Lulu Belle.
She fed her baby poison--
God save her soul from hell!

TILITA
Old Massa was a gambler...

THE MEN
His fortune was sinking low.

TILITA
He called poor Lulu and told her...

THE MEN
He had to let the baby go!

CHORUS
I dreamed last night about
Sad-mouthed Lulu Belle.
She fed her baby poison --
God save her soul from hell!

TILITA
"Oh, Massa, no!" she pleaded...

WOMEN
As she knelt down on her knees!

TILITA
"I beg you, I beseech you,
Don't sell my poor chile please!"

WOMEN
"I beg you, I beseech you,
Don't sell my poor chile please!"

TILITA
She toss'd allnight, tormented,
Till about the break of day.
Say, "I birthed this chile in sorrow,
But tain't goin live that way!"

CHORUS
She toss'd all night, tormented,
Till about the break of day.
Say, "I birthed this chile in sorrow,
But tain't goin live that way!"

TILITA
Old Massa laid it on her...

THE MEN
And cuss'd her cause she wouldn't pray!

TILITA
But just before she closed her eyes...

THE WOMEN
She looked at him and say:

TILITA
"If I were you and you were me,
I wouldn't beat you this-a way!"

CHORUS
I dreamed last night about
Sad-mouthed Lulu Belle.
She fed her baby poison--
God save her soul from hell!

TILITA
She toss'd all night, tormented,
Till about the break of day,
Say, "I birthed this chile in sorrow,
But tain't goin live that way!"

CHORUS
She toss'd all night, tormented,
Till about the break of day,
Say, "I birthed this chile in sorrow,
But tain't goin live that way!"

I dreamed last night about
Sad-mouthed Lulu Belle.
She fed her baby poison--
God save her soul from hell!

(Silence reigns)

LEAH
(Entering up Right)
Hardy here?

LEONARD
No. But he's round somewhere.

LEAH
(Peering into darkness)
Uncle Jerry, are you here?

SOL

He back to the quarter, but sit down. I'm sure one of them'll be here fore long.

(The GROUP is constrained. They glance at one another, all wanting to speak, but none seemingly knowing what to say)

TILITA

(As LEAH sits by well)

Is it true, Leah?

LEAH

This talk about me being sold?

TILITA

Yes.

LEAH

I don't know any more than you do, Tilita...But I do know whoever started it has got Mama on the verge of losing her mind.

LEE

(Up Right)

Here come your Mama now, Leah.

BETTY

(Looking off at approaching SELENA)

Poor thing. I know she wretched.

(Music begins)

LEAH

I wish some of you would please try to talk to her.

SINEY

We understand, Honey -- But what can anybody say --?

LEAH

Tell her I'll be all right --

SELENA

(A middle-aged woman who has obviously been quite attractive physically -- Entering and singing disconsolately)

Got a bosom full of sorrow, a soul full of wretchedness,
Got a bosom full of sorrow, a soul full of wretchedness,
I feel like Hagar cast in the wilderness!

(Seeing Leah and joining her)

I wish there was someway, Baby,
Poor Mama could comfort you.
But try to hold your head high,
If it's the last thing you do!

Got a bosom full of sorrow, a soul full of wretchedness,
Got a bosom full of sorrow, a soul full of wretchedness,
I feel like Hagar cast in the wilderness!

You got a dark way to go,
And no light to see you through,
But maybe day'll break soon
And happiness'll shine on you!

Got a bosom full of sorrow, a soul full of wretchedness,
Got a bosom full of sorrow, a soul full of wretchedness,
I feel like Hagar cast in the wilderness!

(UPSON appears up-Right and the OTHERS, seeing him, melt silently away)

Lawd, if I was the wind
And had the power to,
I'd make me a tornado
And tear this world in two!

Got a bosom full of sorrow, and, Lawd, I'm comfortless,
Got a bosom full of sorrow, and, Lawd, I'm comfortless,
I feel like Hagar cast in the wilderness!

(Stooping, she attempts to lift LEAH -- both unaware of Upson's presence)

Get up, Baby --

UPSON

(Startling them as he comes down)

What's the matter with her?

SELENA

(Turning, as LEAH springs up -- She herself quickly recovering)

What you speck?

UPSON

(Taken aback)

What should I expect? What the dickens do you mean? What's going on anyway? All this mourning and groaning -- Anybody'd think one of you were dead!

SELENA

We'd be better off!

UPSON

What is it, Leah?

SELENA

(Interposing)
Go, wait for me.

(LEAH goes out, Up-Right)

UPSON

Is something the matter with her?

SELENA

You know what's the matter -- Why ask? You don't have to pretend. You Master.

UPSON

Confounded, Selena -- I've told you I don't know! Now what is it?

SELENA

I hear you goin sell her!

UPSON

(Expostulating)
Why -- why that's a lie! You should know better!

SELENA

I know what I'm talking about.

UPSON

It's ridiculous, Selena. You know I never sell anybody!

SELENA

Maybe you don't know. But it's so. Old Miss is --

UPSON

Mahalia--?

(SHE nods)

Where'd you hear that?

SELENA

Never mind. I'm telling you the truth. She's made up her mind I reckon -- now she goin sell my chile -- and you know why!

UPSON

She wouldn't dare!

SELENA

She plannin it, I tell you. She plannin to do it behind your back! -- But, oh, Aaron, you mustn't let her.
(In tears)
You know how she feels 'bout me. She never did understand, but you do. You know I never wronged her -- not willingly --

UPSON

Hush! Shut your mouth!

SELENA

But you know tha -- You're my witness before God!

UPSON

(Shaking her)
Selena! I told you to hush!
(Awkwardly trying to comfort her)
You should know I'd never let any harm come to Leah, or you either. Haven't I always stood by you? Nobody's going to sell anybody without my knowledge and consent. I know Mahalia. But she wouldn't dare try anything like this behind my back. You go on home. I'll look into it. And don't fret!

SELENA

Then I can depend on you?

UPSON

I told you not to fret! Now go on--and tell the others I say I want this foolishness cut out!
(Exit Down-Right)

SELENA

(Relieved)
Thank you, Aaron. But for Gawd's sake don't fail me -- I ain't got long to live and I want to be with my chile.
(Turning to go, she halts seeing LEAH re-entering)
Oh, Baby. He say we ain't to fret!

LEAH

(Unconvinced, but sparing her)
There. You see. I told you not to worry---Don't cry anymore. Go home and get some sleep. Just treat it like a nightmare that's over.

SELENA

You come stay with me.

LEAH

She'll miss me if I'm not in my room, and it's better if I pretend I don't know anything...You go on---

HARDY

(Entering Up-Left)

That you, Leah--

(Happily joining them)

Well, my goodness, I just knew you were in bed, and I wouldn't get to see you till tomorrow--

(Suddenly)

But what're you two doing out here alone?

LEAH

Where were you?

HARDY

Carrying out your wish, of course-- I just got back.

LEAH

Oh---

HARDY

(Noticing Selena)

You've been crying--what's the matter?

LEAH

She's been frightened. But she's all right now--Run on, Mama. Make yourself a cup of tea and go to bed---I'll be all right, and I'll see you first thing in the morning.

SELENA

(Going)

I'll go. But I just know I'll never sleep, Lawd.

(Exit)

HARDY

(Puzzled)

What happened?

LEAH

(Going up)

Wait a moment!

(Seeing Selena's gone, she drifts back)

I didn't want to say anything in her presence because she's worried sick already----

HARDY

What is it?

LEAH
(Her eyes brimming with a sense of injustice)
Old Miss has threatened to sell me.

HARDY
(Stunned)
Surely you don't expect me to believe that?

LEAH
(In tears, softly)
It's true, nevertheless.

HARDY
But, good Lord, Leah--How can it be?

LEAH
I told you she didn't like me.

HARDY
(Indignantly)
What difference does it make? You know we don't sell nobody--I don't care if she hates you, she can't do anything like this to you!---Why, Good God, you might as well say the whole world's gone crazy!

LEAH
(Quietly)
What you and I think doesn't matter.

(The Lights begin fading)

HARDY
(Trying his best to get back to earth)
Oh, there must be some misunderstanding---

LEAH
(Drying her eyes)
Stop trying to fool yourself, Hardy. She's promised to get rid of me--Ephriam overheard her--And you know her as well as I do.

HARDY
(Wildly)
But why?

LEAH
(Hollowly)
She resented some compliment Mr. Burden passed on me in her presence, and she promised Adelaide she'd have me on the block by Monday or Tuesday.

HARDY
(His house of cards tumbling)
Jesus Christ Almighty! Why she practically raised us---
And yet, she can think a dirty thing like this--and for nothing!

LEAH
The Colonel told Mama not to fret--But I don't trust him.

HARDY
(Embracing her, desperately)
Oh, Leah, darling!
(His gaze lifts to the rim of the bespangled sky, and he groans as though crushed by its immensity)
Oh, I've been a God damned fool!
(Suddenly in anger)
But I'll run amok! I'll die and be damned before I let them do a thing like this to you!

C U R T A I N

ACT II

Scene 1

The porch.

TIME: The same evening.

MAHALIA seated alone.

MAHALIA
(As UPSON appears below)
It's time you got back.

UPSON
I took a walk. But what's this tommyrot I hear about you planning to sell Leah?

MAHALIA
(Coolly)
Where'd you get that?

UPSON
You heard the Nigras going wild. I went back there and they upset me so, I had to take a walk to quiet my nerves.

MAHALIA
Nothing the Nigras do surprise me.

UPSON
If Leah's forgot herself, she'll be punished. But you should know better than to start such a rumor.

MAHALIA
Who said I did?

UPSON
I just told you -- the Nigras.

MAHALIA
Which one?

UPSON
Do you mean which one I spoke to?

MAHALIA
Yes.

UPSON

Why, Selena.

MAHALIA

So that's where you've been all this time? You made it your business to go see her.

UPSON

I told you I went out there to investigate. It so happened Selena was in the crowd. Naturally she complained to me -- What mother wouldn't under the circumstances?

MAHALIA

And I suppose you reassured her?

UPSON

Certainly.

MAHALIA

Well, that's unfortunate. Selena happens to be my dam, and so is her filly.

UPSON

(Slowly)

In other words, I've no voice? I'm no longer master here?

MAHALIA

As to you pettying my Nigras, enough is enough!

UPSON

So you're simply going to walk over me!

MAHALIA

For twenty-five years I stood aside and let you manage to suit yourself -- And with what results? -- I brought you fifty prime hands and $50,000 in cash. Yet, today, my children must start life as beggars.

UPSON

What the dickens are you talking about, Mahalia -- Have you lost your reason?

MAHALIA

Why has Greg had to marry beneath him? Who's fault is it I can't provide a decent dowry for Adelaide?

UPSON

Of all the tommyrot I've ever heard, this is the most asinine --

MAHALIA

Call it what you like, you can't deny it.

UPSON
(Burning)
We'll let it slide -- But perhaps you can tell me what this has to do with your desire to get rid of Leah?

MAHALIA
I'm simply telling you I intend to manage things my way in future.

UPSON
That's problematical. I want to know what've you got against Leah?

MAHALIA
She's been reading too much -- thanks to you, and thinks she's above her station -- I won't have her round here, putting on her ridiculous airs -- She's dangerous, and has begun to sow seeds of rebellion among the others -- Furthermore --

UPSON
Just a minute -- What grounds have you for saying that?

MAHALIA
I overheard her telling Cora if she was a man she'd have freedom, or like Richard III cut her way out with a bloody axe!

UPSON
Bah! She'd probably been reading Shakespeare, and so let her imagination run away with her.

MAHALIA
Nevertheless, it's time we got rid of her. She's in the way -- a threat to my own daughter's happiness.

UPSON
Now I know you must've fallen and hit your head against something!

MAHALIA
I know what I'm talking about. She's lost sight of her place, and begun to vie with Adelaide, parading her yellow self before every young man who presents himself in this house.

UPSON
Has she made any advance toward any of them?

MAHALIA
How should I know, though I wouldn't put it past her.

UPSON
So on the grounds of such suspicion, you're just going to get rid of her -- How do you think the rest of the Nigras are going to feel if you're foolish enough to dispose of her on such paltry grounds? Aren't we haunted enough without your going out of your way on a whim to stir them up? It's such stupidity that breeds desperate Nigras like Denmark and Nat Turner.

MAHALIA
I'll not harbor the wench to be my daughter's rival.

UPSON
That's impossible, and you know damn well it is.

MAHALIA
I know better from my own experience.

UPSON
(Shocked)
Just what do you mean by that remark?

MAHALIA
(Sharply)
Never mind. I don't care to discuss it. You know my decision.

UPSON
(Angrily)
I do, eh? Well, by God, I'm still the head of this house, and as long as I am, no Nigra of mine is going to be placed on the block.

MAHALIA
(In cold fury)
You may do as you please with your Nigras. But you're not going to dictate to me with regard to mine!

UPSON
We'll see about that!

MAHALIA
(Darkly)
I've still got a Daddy down in Alabama, and he's got fifteen thousand good acres and a Nigra to till every one of them!

UPSON
Your threats don't impress me!

MAHALIA
I'm merely warning you, Aaron. I won't stand any abuse.

UPSON
I understand very well what you meant. You'd sooner break up our home than be fair!

MAHALIA
You should be the last to speak of what's fair.

UPSON
But, my God, Mahalia, you can't sell the girl just because she walked through the house -- Or made some thoughtless remark -- It's monstrous!

MAHALIA
(Innocently)
I expected you to defend her. After all, it's only natural.

UPSON
Common sense tells me, she's innocent.

MAHALIA
(Venomously)
So, I suppose, is Selena?

UPSON
What's Selena got to do with it? The poor woman has spent her life in loyal service to you.

MAHALIA
(Thrusting home)
If she's been so loyal to me, how is it Leah's got the same hair, the same nose, and the same colored eyes as my children?

UPSON
(Shocked)
Good God! After all these years you dare accuse me?

MAHALIA
You thought I was a fool. You thought you'd been so clever I couldn't know!

UPSON
(Indignant)
Why, damn it, Mahalia -- Have you forgotten Charlie Wingate?

MAHALIA
(Momentarily surprised)
Charlie Wingate?

UPSON
Yes. My old overseer -- Who was here when you came?

MAHALIA

(Laughing)
You think you're so clever! -- Do you think I didn't watch you? I saw you go into Selena's cabin many a night!

UPSON
That's a lie. If you had, you'd have accused me years ago!

MAHALIA
I had my own children to think of. I could've caught you. But I'd sooner have followed you into that Paddock, than to have walked in on you and humiliated myself before the black wench --

(Bitterly)
Why I haven't poisoned you both is more than I'll ever understand!--But she's going to suffer as I have. I want to see her pine away, till she withers like a leaf, and let the winds of death blow her out of my sight forever!

UPSON

(Appalled)
Mahalia, for years I've known you were bitter. But such hate--and against a poor ignorant slave woman--Why if you had positive proof, you should know the woman would've had to do my biddings.

MAHALIA
So you admit it?

UPSON
Don't distort my meaning. I've told you, Charlie Wingate's the man responsible. Furthermore, everybody in Greenup County knows my reputation--You can't point to a single man whose life has been more exemplary!

MAHALIA

(Laughing)
You mean, more hypocritical, you rogue!

UPSON
Naturally--Because I refuse to live by your standards. That's why you spoke so contemptuously of Sally--Her Daddy doesn't own fifteen hundred Nigras, but ten--So she's beneath you! And this tommyrot about Adelaide's dowry--Well. I didn't raise her to be thrown into that morass of waste and corruption that goes by the name of Athenian Society in Louisville and Charleston---

MAHALIA
You and your righteousness--you make me laugh!

(Music begins)

UPSON

I happen to know that sort of life can only be had at the expense of the bondmen. They're the ones who must pay in sweat and blood!

MAHALIA

(Singing. Satirically)

There was a crafty rogue
Of fairly low degree
Who suffered in want of a cure
For inferiority!

UPSON

By God, Mahalia. Don't make me get my gorge up!

MAHALIA

(Continuing)

Because the rogue was handsome--
Indeed, gallant in his way--
He caught the eye of a lady
And stole her heart one day!

UPSON

Go on. Keep it up. I've warned you!

MAHALIA

(Undaunted)

Although she brought him wealth
And enhanced his reputation,
Somehow the rogue fell lower
In his own estimation!

UPSON

(Striding to door to shout)

You confounded bitch!--Jeb, bring me my shot gun!

MAHALIA

And then he got the notion
He'd acquire benignity
By giving his devotion
To the cause of slavery!
His taste, how'e'er, for brandy
And breast of guinea hen
Soon proved incompatible
With such a noble whim!

ADELAIDE

(Emerging in fear)

Oh, Mama, what're you two up to!

MAHALIA

(Ignoring her)

So he took up moderation
As the aim and end of life,
And even chose a mistress
Supposedly to spare his wife!

UPSON

(Shouting within)

Nigra, didn't I tell you to bring my gun!

MAHALIA

He smiled at his good fortune
And settled down to rest--
Sans honor, sans fulfillment,
Sighing compromise is best!

ADELAIDE

(Seeing JEB with gun she snatches it, and darts away from her father)

Run, Mama!

UPON

(Chasing her)

Give me that gun!

MAHALIA

Give it to him, Honey. He'll do nothing. He's through posing. I'm putting a stop to it.--
(Crossing to door--to halt and turn to Upson)
And if you oppose me, I'll have you tarred and feathered and run out of Greenup County!
(Exit within)

UPSON

(Plunging down steps and running off around side of the house, shouting)

Leonard! Leonard! Saddle my horse!
(Exit)

BLACKOUT

ACT II

Scene 2

The Well.

TIME: Sunday, the following day.

TILITA and LEONARD, with their mothers, BETTY and AMY-- The last in tears.

LEONARD
(Sharply)
You done spent your life slavin for them bastards. Yet now you askin us to do the same---

AMY
(Warningly)
The quagmire don't put out no sign!

LEONARD
Ain't nothin goin happen to us--You ought to be glad to see us wid the spunk to go.

BETTY
You ain't goin take Tilita.

LEONARD
But, Ant Betty, you know things ain't goin be the same round here no more!

BETTY
At least we know what to expect.

AMY
Let him go on. Hard head make a bloody back.

LEONARD
It's a mighty blind horse don't know when the trough is empty.

AMY
You jes don't have no pity on me.

LEONARD
Ma, you know I keer. But look who Leah is!

BETTY
Old Miss is jes out for vengeance!

AMY
I tell him tha. I'se told him and told him. But I might as well be pourin water on a mallard duck.

BETTY
(Darkly)
I got a way to stop him.

TILITA
(Glaring at her)
Meanin what?

BETTY
Never you mind!--If it wasn't for you, Ant Amy, I'd go straight to the Big House now!

TILITA
(Pained)
You do and I'll be through with you forever!

BETTY
(Furious)
I'm thinkin for your sake, you lil fool!--You follow him to your sorrow. Leonard can't walk no water. Do you think he's Jesus? Even if you could get cross that Ohio, what kind of life you think you goin find in a land of strangers? You know you got no money. With no friends--Not a soul to give you so much as a kind word--What you goin do case you run out of grub or sickness knock on the door?

TILITA
How you know so much? You ain't never set foot off the place.

BETTY
I don't care. I know enough to see you all jes tryin to swap fright for terror--I don't say Leonard don't love you. But I ain't goin stand for him to stampede you way from here. They catch you all, they'll sell you down the river. If he's any kind of man, and care anythin about you, tha ought to be his last wish---
(Going)
Ant Amy, I ain't got no more to say. You can stop him if you want to--But don't say I ain't been a open book.
(Exit--Up-Right)

AMY
(Rising)
I'll never forgive her for this.

LEONARD

You goin lemme go?

AMY

(Going)
You heard what she said. You's a man now, and my part's over. What's left is tween you and the white folks--But run or stay, one of these days you'll learn; Life for us like the thistle seed--grey beards blown hither and tither at de mercy of the winds.

LEONARD

I ain't no thistle seed, Ma. I'm a man, and long's I got the strenf in these legs, I'm goin walk like one.

AMY

(Going)
Betty done tole you, you can't walk cross the water.
(Exit)

LEONARD

Damn tha. We find a way.

TILITA

How?

LEONARD

Who can tell? All I want to know: Who you goin listen to, me or your Mama?

TILITA

(Smiling)
I'm surprised you ask.

(Music begins)

LEONARD

(Smiling)
Then you ain't skeered?--

TILITA

(Singing--bouyantly)
Where you go I go, Honeybunch!
Anywhere at all will do,
For I know we belong together
And my hope's tied-up with you!

He
Lawd, listen to me, Darling Mine!
Believe me I'll see you through,
Because if other folks can make it
I sure can make it too!

She
That's what I like about
you, Baby,
Nothing don't worry you--
You make me feel like life's
a feather,
And I'm sailing through the
blue!

He
I'd rather be a watch dog, Honey,
Barking up at the moon,
Than take this world as a caution
And trouble to be my doom!

She
Sure, this world's too big
and boundless
To let them fence us in--
There's bound to be a corner
somewhere
For us to settle down in!

He
Side by side we'll swing our
scythes
Regardless of the weather--
We'll laugh and sing and cut
us a swathe
Right down through life to-
gether!

SELENA
(Entering)
Leonard, I don't reckon he come, did he?

LEONARD
No'm--Not yet.

SELENA
What 'bout Hardy?

LEONARD
(Hooking his finger Up-Left)
Him and Leah back there somewhere---

TILITA
Ant Selena, you mind if I tell you sompen?

SELENA
What?

TILITA
Me and Leonard us been thinking--Don't say nothing to mama cause she don't want us to leave here. But we going anyhow, and I think the best thing for you is to make Leah go too.

SELENA
Ain't nothing goin happen to Leah.

TILITA
Did you know Old Miss and the Cunnel had a fight last night?

SELENA
Yeah. I heard 'bout it.

LEONARD
And you ain't skeered?

SELENA
Why should-a be?

TILITA
(Seeing HARDY and LEAH entering Up-Left)
Here they is now.

HARDY
(Coming down -- To Selena)
We were just going back to your cabin--Leah, here, in spite of what happened last night, won't listen to me---
(To Leonard and Tilita)
Excuse us, will you all?

LEONARD
Sure. But if you talking 'bout running way--Thas what me and Tilita goin do--Ain't we, Tilita?

TILITA
(To Leah)
I was just telling her--and I think if you got any sense, you'll lead the way!

(Led by SINEY, several of the older women enter)

SELENA
What you and Leonard do is your business. But as for Leah, you can drop this kind of talk. You think you know. But you don't. She ain't got nothin to be scared of. I'm birthed her, and I should know.

HARDY
But what if you're both wrong?

SELENA
Last night the Cunnel started to shoot Old Miss about Leah! Would he do tha if he didn't care?

HARDY
You notice he ran off to town, don't you?

(Curious, the rest of the SLAVES enter)

SELENA
Anybody git mad, try to cool off.

HARDY
He's had all night to cool off. But he still ain't back--- For all we know, he might've given in to Old Miss---I can't understand what kind of Mother you call yourself, taking such a desperate chance.-- Leah won't listen to me, though she knows I love and would go to hell for her!

SELENA
I know you care for her, Hardy, and the last thing I'd do is tell her wrong. But you don't know the Cunnel like me. You all see him comin and goin like he ain't payin me and her no mind. But thas jes cause of Old Miss. He used to come to my cabin all the time till she scared him off. And when this chile was little, you couldn't keep em apart. He was always cuddlin her and bringin her sweets. He took her in the Big House, just so he could be some kind of father to her, and raise her like the rest. The only reason you know how to read and write today is cause he wanted Leah to have some kind of learnin, but he had to fool Old Miss. So he used you to hide his hand, and, when your Ma died, ghin you to Hilliard.--Yet, you goin tell me I can't trust him! You might as well be askin me to believe firewood won't burn.

HARDY
All right. You all have it your way. All I say is I hope to God you won't live to regret it.

LEAH
You may be perfectly right, Hardy. But if I left here, there's no telling what wrath wouldn't fall on Mama's head. Old Miss might even sell her, at her age, into the hands of some miserable dog. On the other hand, I just can't see myself running. You've shown me you love me, and I believe we'd be happy - at least as much as anybody in these times. But I want to see this through--for a number of reasons, I do. I belong here, and I'm not going to let her chase me away like some hunted animal.

HARDY
In other words, you think you can defy her and get away with it?

LEAH
She may sell me, but it'll be on her conscience.

HARDY
Good Lord!
(Appealing to others, desperately)
Siney--some of you all--tell this foolish girl I'm right. Make her see. If she stays here she's lost!

SINEY
With all due respect to you, Selena, I think he's right. Old Miss is hard and proud. If she done made up her mind, Leah's good as gone. And you above anybody round here must know what she's in for--
(To Leah)
These Massas buy you chile jes to wuk you by day and use you like a gyp by night.

HANNAH
Yes, Lawd--and pray as you mought, twon't be none too comfort you.

LEAH
I understand. But it's a chance I've got to take.

HARDY
What about what you told me yesterday? What about what you made me do?

LEAH
What I told you was right, and what you did was good. But this is different. I have my self respect to think of. I'll not be treated like a dog!

TILITA
But, Leah, you can't fight them!

SOL
She raise her hand they kill her!

CROWD
It's the Gawd's trufe!
Shoot you down without mercy!
They hang her that's what!

LEAH
You all don't see---

CROWD

You the one!
Yeah. She won't listen!
She'll be sorry!
Sure, Leah. They make your heart bleed like runnin water!

LEAH

I know you all mean me well. You're the only friends I've got in the world, and I appreciate your wanting to save me. But I know what's behind this, and it's not just my being who I am, or because of Mama. Old Miss can't stand my spirit. She'd drop this idea
(Snapping her finger)
that quick, if I got down on my knees to her. But I'll meet her in hell before I'll lower myself just to salve her pride--And as for the Colonel--Well, we'll see what we'll see--I may be rejected, but I'll not be despised. Neither by her or any of the rest of them.

HARDY

In other words, you're going to be a martyr!

LEAH

I don't expect you to follow me, Hardy--

HARDY

(Flaring)
No! I'm some dummy!

LEAH

(Sharply)
You've got your faults!

HARDY

You're so smart! I'm only trying to help you. So is the rest. But you're so proud you got to take offense and try to belittle me!

LEAH

You think it's all right to insult me!

HARDY

How? In what way?

LEAH

You accuse me of trying to be a martyr!

HARDY

(Walking away)
You're crazy!
(He sits disgruntled)

LEAH
Maybe I am. Maybe they'll dispose of me. Yet, some good may come of it--
(Sharply)
if no more than to teach you all what a fool's paradise you've been living in.

HARDY
(Taking it personally)
Is that so?

LEAH
(In tears)
Yes, it's so. Maybe you'll learn a little kind treatment may be a welcome thing, but it's beneath anyone fashioned in the image of God to go on being satisfied, living at somebody else's mercy. All of you go on year after year, with the same unconcern about the plight of the rest, scattered all over this shameful land, dragging their days out in chains with nobody to help them!

HARDY
Did you ever stop to think who's got the Sheriff and the judge and the law, and the gunpowder on their side?

LEAH
I know very well there's truth in what you say. But we've no right to accept it. We owe it to ourselves and one another to remember freedom-- and it's unworthy of anybody ever to forget it!

(Music begins)

SOL
(Stung)
I reckon us had this comin.

LEAH
I may sound harsh, Uncle Sol. But I don't mean to hurt anybody's feelings- I'm just so full about this mess, and everything--And it does seem as a people we don't know what we're missing. But, oh---!
(Singing)
If you could wake up in the morning
And be your own dear masters,
And find that Justice is for all
To-day and all hereafters:
You'd know freedom is a grand and a beautiful thing!

(The CROWD is caught up and swept
into a great chorus)

If you could rise up from your beds
To vote and have some voice,
And unbeholden to any man
Wed your own dear choice,
And keep your children by your side
Enjoying the chance they need
To grow and learn in open schools
Regardless of race or creed:
You'd know freedom is a grand and a beautiful thing!

Oh, if you could grasp what it would mean
To have the right to work
And time enough for rest and joy
As your well-earned desert:
You'd know freedom is a grand and a beautiful thing!

CURTAIN

ACT II

Scene 3

The porch.

TIME: The following Monday morning.

JEB and AUCTIONEER enter from garden.

JEB

Wait here, Sah.
(He goes within)

MAHALIA
(Emerging with him behind her in a moment)
Did you see anything of your Master?
(She nods to Auctioneer)

JEB
Yes'm. He's at the Bolton House.

AUCTIONEER
Is she ready?

MAHALIA
Yes.
(She unfastens keys)

AUCTIONEER
Good. I got a sale scheduled for this afternoon, and I'd like to get back as soon as I can.

MAHALIA
(Handing keys to Jeb)
You'll find her in her room--Go and bring her here.

JEB
(Going, reluctantly)
Yes'm.
(He goes within)

AUCTIONEER
I notice you spoke of the Colonel being in town -- I'll have to have his authorization.

MAHALIA
It isn't necessary. She's part of my dowry, that is, an offspring. Here's the deed.

AUCTIONEER
(Taking document and studying it)
Oh, I see...Have you registered this at Greenup?

MAHALIA
Yes. I also have a clause in my marriage contract -- if you'd like to see it?

AUCTIONEER
Oh, no, Mam. Twon't be necessary. Just deliver the gal and tell me what you're asking for her.

MAHALIA
She's a mulatto wench, and I've trained her as a house maid. She should bring a right good price, don't you think?

AUCTIONEER
Is she pretty?

MAHALIA
Yes -- Too pretty.

AUCTIONEER
Well -- would you say, $1500?

MAHALIA
Not a penny less than $2,000.

AUCTIONEER
In Raceland, Mam?

MAHALIA
I won't take less. She should bring more than a top, prime field hand.

AUCTIONEER
(Shaking his head negatively)
In Memphis, maybe -- or down to New Orleans, perhaps. But here the planters aren't much for bidding on house maids.

MAHALIA
You won't have any difficulty --
(Seeing JEB emerge with LEAH)
See for yourself!

(Music begins as hubbub is heard approaching)

MAHALIA

(Seeing others)

What do you come out here for? Go back to the Quarters, this is no circus!

SELENA

(Distraught, pushing her way through crowd of Negroes)

Oh, Mistress, they say this man done come for my chile!

(Music begins)

You know I'se just a slave! From birth I been beholden!

MAHALIA

(Singing)

Strumpet, get away from my door!
Your tears come far too late!
When you had that wench there years ago,
You plighted your troth with fate!

SELENA

(Groaning she sinks to steps)

Lord, have mercy!

(And in a moment THEY are singing as a duet)

There's no use trying to move me!
Take yourself out of my face --
I brought you from home on my wedding day,
But you tried to take my place!

You're ready to swear your innocence,
And disavow your shame,
But when you failed to come to me,
You proved you were to blame!

If my pillow could speak like a trumpet
About the way you treated me,
The world would know I've been the slave,
While you the slave were free!

But the king's will now is broken
And the queen now sits on the throne,
You drained her heart of all mercy
And she can't forgive your wrong!

So just get away from my door!
Take yourself out of my face.

I brought you from home on my wedding day,
But you tried to take my place!

There's no use trying to move me
By shedding tears this late.
When you had that wench there years ago,
You plighted your troth with fate!

Yes, the king's will now is broken
And the queen now sits on the throne.
You drained her heart of all mercy
And she'll never forgive your wrong!

SELENA
(Singing as indicated above)
Before you and God, I'm on my knees,
Have mercy on my poor lot please!
Don't separate me from my only chile --
Stop for just a minute, think for a while --
My tears falling like rain in my face:
Spare my poor baby from this disgrace!
I beg you,
I beseech you!
Keep us together.
Don't sell my only chile --
She's all I got
And she needs her Ma --
Don't sell us apart
I'm pleadin to you
With a bleeding heart
Don't sell her
I'll be faithful to you
I'll labor for you day and night
I'll be loyal and obedient --

LEAH
(Distraught)
Mama, get up off your knees! Don't you see she's got a heart of stone and pity's unknown to her!

SELENA
But, Baby, she's all we got to turn to for mercy!

LEAH
(Furious)
I spit on her mercy! And I'd rather see you hang yourself than let her stand there gloating over your misery --

MAHALIA
You impudent wench! You're not the first to cry sour grapes!

LEAH
You haven't heard me pleading to you!

MAHALIA
You know better, you undeserving hussy!

LEAH
You're so proud and mighty! If you were half the woman you pretend to be, you'd spare her of your own accord. You know she's innocent. Yet you persecute her and want to crucify me--And for what? Because everytime you look in my face, you have to swallow the truth: God made her your equal!

MAHALIA
(Striking her)
How dare you!

LEAH
(Quietly)
So the truth hurts?

MAHALIA
(Furious)
Take her away before I kill her!

SELENA
(In despair)
Lord, have mercy!

LEAH
Never mind, Mama--God sees how she's treating us!

AUCTIONEER
(Taking her arm)
Come along, Gal!

LEAH
(To Mahalia)
You may make us suffer now. But God's going to punish you for this one of these days!

(As she is led off, SELENA falls with a wail of despair)

JERRY
(As the other WOMEN begin weeping -- he thunders in irrepressible rage -- and in a moment they are all singing)
One of these days and twon't be long
Ole Arch Angel goin blow his horn

Summon everybody to the judgment seat! (OTHERS join)
Summon everybody to the judgment seat!
Yes, summon every soul
Both the young and the old!
Summon everybody to the judgment seat!

Oh, won't it be some morning,
Oh, won't it be a awful day!
I think I hear the sinners a-crying
I think I hear the sinners a-crying:
"Lawd, have mercy on-a poor me
I didn't mean to treat em that-a-way
I didn't mean to treat em that-a-way
I didn't mean to treat em that-a-way --
Lawd, have mercy on-a poor me
I didn't mean to treat em that-a-way!
(Leading the OTHERS out, their voices diminishing to a whisper --)
Lawd, have mercy on-a poor me
I didn't mean to treat em that-a-way
I didn't mean to treat em that-a-way
I didn't mean to treat em that-a-way
Lawd, have mercy on-a poor me
I didn't mean to treat em that-a-way!

(SINEY and BETTY aid SELENA to her feet and assisting her, follow the others out)

(JEB is alone as the LIGHTS FADE)

ACT II

Scene 4

Entrance to Saloon of the Bolton House.

TIME: That afternoon.

A porch one step above the ground with arm-chairs flanking a swinging door.

HARDY appears on Left to step onto porch, going to door---

VOICE
(Up the street--arresting him with shout)
Hey there, Fellow!

(HARDY halts in a quandary. He glances behind him, then again starts for door-- but is arrested again as the voice sounds imperatively)

Hey, there! Wait!

HARDY
(Indicating himself with a questioning finger)
Me?

VOICE
(Sharply)
Yeah!

HARDY
(Muttering)
What the devil--?

EPPS
(The Negro bartender, appearing in white apron and carrying an empty tray--Whispering gravely)
Man, what you fixin to do? Don't go in tha front door!

HARDY
(Unnerved)
I've got to see Colonel Upson---.

EPPS
You ought to have more sense. Go round the back.

HARDY
(Weakly)
They all know me.

EPPS
All the more the reason for one of em lay you out.

HARDY
(Desperately)
Well, call him for me, will you? Just tell him Hardy's outside and ask him if he'll please step here.

EPPS
(Going within)
I'll see.

HARDY
Thanks, very much.

(EPPS exits and HARDY pulls watch to glance at time. Shortly, he sees UPSON emerging)

Thank God, Colonel--! I've been searching high and low for you. They've got Leah in the stockade, ready to put her on the block within the hour!

UPSON
I saw her brought into town and I'm afraid there's nothing I can do.

HARDY
Sir, you don't mean that?

UPSON
I'm afraid so.

HARDY
Lord, Colonel!

UPSON
It's a sad day for us all. But she don't belong to me.

HARDY
But, Sir, you always said she was one of the family--Her and me both!

UPSON
Leah belongs to your Mistress. She's got the bit between her teeth, and the Devil couldn't make her "Gee or Haw!" --- We'll just have to hope Leah'll find a good master.

HARDY
Old Miss's just angry, right now. She'd never do a thing like this in her right mind. She'll do this then be sorry afterwards. She'll blame you for not stopping her.

UPSON
We've already had it out. Any interference from me, and she'll pack up and go home, and take all her folks with her.

HARDY
My God, Sir. Surely she can't mean it.

UPSON
If she don't, she's got her bluff in, and it's too big for me to call without jeopardizing the others.

HARDY
But what about Leah, Sir? She's depending on you. And so are the rest of us--When I left home, Selena was in bed, frothing at the mouth and everybody else was just sick with grief. Nobody can't understand - knowing you, and what you stand for. They all think you just don't know. You never did sell anybody before.

UPSON
It's hard no doubt for any of you to fathom. But you'll just have to make the best of it.

HARDY
Sir, let me buy her -- I've some money. More than half of what she's liable to bring.

UPSON
What'd you mean more than half?

HARDY
(Pulling sack of gold pieces)
I managed to raise $1100 this morning, when I couldn't find you.

UPSON
Raised it how? Who'd let you have so much cash?

HARDY
Selena gave me $300 she'd saved, and I borrowed the balance from some of our folks here in town.

UPSON
Nigras, you mean?

HARDY
Yes, Sir.

UPSON
Which Nigras ?

HARDY
You wouldn't know them, Sir. Just a couple of freemen.

UPSON
What freemen--who are they?

HARDY
Please, Colonel. You know how scared they are of getting into trouble--I had to promise not to break their confidence.

UPSON
Well, return their money. There's no way I can help without your Mistress discovering I had a hand in it sooner or later.

HARDY
But, Sir, Lil Boss is still in Ashland. I've nowhere else to turn - and Leah'll be broken-hearted!

UPSON
Bah! She's bound to fall into the hands of some of the neighbors.

HARDY
(Desperately)
Maybe you don't understand, Colonel. But I love Leah. She's dearer than life to me. I know she's never done anything to deserve this. She's never been disloyal. She's innocent of any wrong doing whatsoever -- You raised her in your own house, and treated her and me like the rest, and we've loved you for it. Now suddenly you say your hands're tied and you can do nothing-- Why, good God, don't you see Sir, if you of all people can turn your back on us, what's left for anybody to believe in? People will say--

UPSON
I know, boy. I know. -- My choice is between two evils. But I can't break up the house.

Hardy

Well, Sir, how about loaning me the money till Lil Boss gets back?

Upson

It won't work. Hilliard hasn't got that kind of money, and his Ma knows it.

Hardy

But she doesn't have to know anything about it.

Upson

She'd find out sooner or later--

Hardy

But, Colonel, you know Lil Boss'd never stand for this--- How you think he's going look at it, knowing you refused me--knowing you just let Leah go when all you had to do was just---

Upson

That's enough of that! XXXXXXXX He'll have to take it up with his Ma not me.

Hardy

I see, Sir----

Upson

(Softening)

you say you love Leah. I'll try to make arrangements to bring you together. More than that I can't promise. So go on now, and do as I ordered. You can come back and let me what happens at the sale. Get the name of her new owner, and I'll see what I can do.

(Exit within)

Hardy

(Going, in despair)

All right, Colonel. It's all right!

(He goes out slowly, as:)

BLACKOUT

ACT II

Scene 5

The Stockade.

TIME: Midnight. The Same Evening.

An open shed partitioned into two sections, and behind a picket fence with a gate in the center fastened with a lock and chain.

There is a bright new moon and music is heard, as the lights go up, revealing LEAH on Upper bunk, her head resting against a post to which she is bound by a chain fastened to her wrist.

LEAH

(A picture of desolation, she surveys the sky and begins to sing)

Sometimes this world is so bitter
It tastes just like alum to me;
It's full of nothing but sorrow,
And the flight of my dream to be free!
(She scans the sky)
Caged like some beast, all alone
I dwell on my despair,
And all I can see's the new moon
Shining so calm and fair!

They warned and begged me to listen--
Though I knew they'd tear us apart,
I lingered; and now I must pay
The price of a wishful heart!

Like a wounded bird that flutters,
Too weak to return to its nest,
I toss and flounder without hope
For the aching want in my breast.

Oh, I feel so desperate and lonely,
I think I'll go out of my mind!
I've nothing at all to cling to
But the loved ones I leave behind!

Oh, I'm tired and weary of brooding,
I'm sick and I'd sooner be gone
Than live in a world without mercy
And suffer such needless wrong!

Oh, sometimes this world is so bitter,
Sometimes I feel so woebegone.
I wish cold death wouldn't spurn me,
I wish God would please take me home!

(Silence)

1st Man
(Beyond partition)
Hey, you gal!

LEAH
Are you calling me?

1st MAN
(Harshly)
Who you think?

LEAH
What is it?

1st MAN
I wanna know is you through singin?

LEAH
Yes, I suppose --

1st MAN
Well, I hope so -- I hope thas the last of it!

2nd MAN
Nigra, what's the matter with you? What you wanna speak to the gal like tha for?

1st MAN
I speak cause I wanna sleep!

LEAH
I'm sorry --

2nd MAN
Nigra, you ought to be shame! -- You see how she feelin low!

1st MAN
She here now. Jes like us. Let her get used to it -- A man drag a damn chain through the heat n dust all day -- is bad

enough! Yet somebody got to be caterwaulin all through the night!

LEAH

I'm sorry --

UPSON

(Outside singing)
I might not be like Solomon,
The wisest ever born,
But if there's one thing I profess
It's how to make a home!
(Entering, tipsily)
Oh, don't care what they think or call me
Cause I'm a friend to you!
We'll go on pulling right together
And feeding on chicken stew!

(Peering through fence and calling)
Leah!...

(SHE is silent, watching him)

Why don't you answer me when you hear me call?

LEAH

(Coldly)
What do you want--Haven't you done enough?

UPSON

(Staggering about)
Mind your tongue, Girl. That's no way to address me!

(SHE remains silent)

I reckon you're feeling low. But I won't stand no sass.
I came here to do something for you.

LEAH

(Bitterly)
You've done all you could do to me!

UPSON

Don't say that, Leah. I'm here to help you.

LEAH

You're drunk!

UPSON

Bah! Where's the man who calls himself your master?

LEAH
If I knew I wouldn't tell you.

UPSON
What's that? - Is that any way to talk, when I'm here to help you?

LEAH
You had your chance-- And I hope I never see your face again!

UPSON
Are you trying to insult me, Leah? Well, don't do it. There're some things you don't understand---

LEAH
You don't have to lie to me like you did to Mama.

UPSON
I meant what I said to Selena--But your Mistress had my hands tied---

LEAH
So you just let her ship me off to market like a sack of your corn!

UPSON
She took advantage of me, Leah. Years ago I was foolish enough to sign a bad bargain--But never mind that. I'm going to make amends to you----

LEAH
You don't care anything about me. If you did you wouldn't've stayed away from the sale. You wouldn't've stood for them to strip me naked and humiliate me like a stray dog!

UPSON
I guess I got to drinking too heavy---

LEAH
Sure! Who was I to think of? What'd I amount to?

UPSON
Your Mistress drove me to it, Leah. She can't stand goodness.

LEAH
(Sarcastically)
You got your nerve! I'm in here--your own flesh and blood! Yet you talk about your goodness---Well, thank you for sparing me more of it, else I'd be dead!

UPSON
I've been a good master to you all, Leah. Everybody knows that---

LEAH
Sure! Some saint!

UPSON
Confound you, Leah! I'm warning you! You've said enough.

LEAH
That's one comfort!

UPSON
I told you to hush!
(Wandering around, muttering)
Anybody so blind and ungrateful---If you didn't have my sympathy would I be here?---Overnight, my good works all go for nothing--If I drove my Nigras like the rest and spent my time hunting and fishing and giving balls, you'd have some cause to think hard of me--

LEAH
Why did you come here--? What more do you want of me?

UPSON
I come here to explain, Leah--

LEAH
Explain why you allowed me to be sold like one of your marinoes?

UPSON
It was you or the family---

LEAH
And of course, I'm not yours? I'm not part of it!

UPSON
I've tried to be a father to you, Leah.

LEAH
I'll say you have!

UPSON
I didn't make the world. I know it seems hard. But you don't even belong to me. You belong to Mahalia. That's why I couldn't interfere with the sale. I come here now though---

LEAH
To tell me goodbye, is that it?

UPSON
I wanted you to know I plan to speak your new owner---

LEAH
How nice? That's very good of you!

UPSON
I've still got a voice, Leah. Don't forget I am a master, and no man who knows it, would dare mistreat you---

LEAH
Why couldn't you buy me back, if you're so interested? You got money--!

UPSON
What would I do with you? I can't bring you home. If I set you free, you'd have no place to go. All you could do is end up in a brothel.

LEAH
So that's all you think of me?

UPSON
You don't know the world, Leah. There's no place for a girl like you, with nobody round to protect her. -- Mahalia may think she got the best of me, but she can't stop me from keeping my eye on you--
(Chuckles at his thought, and begins singing--)
Oh, I might not be like Solomon
The wisest ever born, (HILLIARD and JEB enter)
But if there's one thing I profess,
It's how to protect my own!

HILLIARD
(Joining him)
Come along, Papa. You're making a fool of yourself.

UPSON
Who sent you--your Ma?

HILLIARD
Yes, Sir. I've had a devil of a time finding you.

UPSON
(Pulling away)
I know when I'm ready to go home.

HILLIARD
You're drunk--anything may happen to you in this condition.

UPSON
Go away, I say. I'm not going back--till I settle about Leah.

HILLIARD
Jeb, get ahold of his other arm!

UPSON
(To Jeb, sharply)
Don't you put your hands on me!

HILLIARD
Papa, you're drunk--Don't you understand. We want to help you.

UPSON
I know how to carry my bourbon, Boy. Go away. I've got business to take care of.

HILLIARD
You can't transact business at midnight.

UPSON
I've got to see the new owner about Leah.

HILLIARD
You should've done that this afternoon--Now he's out in the country--

UPSON
You're lying to me.

HILLIARD
I know what I'm talking about--I inquired for him at the Bolton House.

UPSON
You're lying. I just left the Bolton House--

HILLIARD
(To Jeb)
Get ahold of him!

UPSON
(As JEB obeys)
By God, Boy, you'd better look out. My gorge's rising.
(He snatches away but is caught as he falls)

HILLIARD
You see. You're as weak as a kitten--
(Taking him out between them)
I've got the carriage around the corner---

(JEB waves to Leah as they're going)

UPSON
(As THEY disappear)
Don't you worry, Leah. You mind what I told you. I'll look out for you---

(Exit TRIO)

(LEAH sits numb)

2nd MAN
Gal, who was that man? Your Pa?

(SHE is silent)

Hey, you Gal--Was he sompen to you?

LEAH
(Dully)
You might call him that.

2nd MAN
How come you didn't make him set you free?

LEAH
Please...I feel so bad....
(She turns her face to the wall)

2nd MAN
I speck I know, and I feel for you. I sure do.

(HE is silent and in the distance a steamboat whistle sounds far off-- as though in answer to the signal. HARDY and LEONARD appear)

HARDY
(Calling softly)
Leah!

LEAH
(Sitting up abruptly)
Is that----you?

HARDY
Yes. But don't call my name--Get down. We've come to get you.

(LEONARD slips iron bar through chain on gate)

LEAH
(In bitter relief)
Oh, Darling--!

HARDY
(To Leonard)
Be careful, when you snap it. Don't let it fall!

1st MAN
Hey, Mister--What bout us--?

2nd MAN
Yeah. Mister, please. Take us too.

LEONARD
(Snapping chain)
I got it!

HARDY
Come on, Honey--

LEAH
(Sotto voce)
I can't. I'm chained to the bunk!

HARDY
The devil you say!

LEONARD
(Plunging in)
Lemme see!

1st MAN
Hey, Mister--God's sake--

LEONARD
Shut your damn mouth, Man--You want to get us all caught!
(Cursing as he struggles with chain)
Them bastards! They got enough damn chain here to tie a elephant!

HARDY
Don't bother her wrist--Snap it from the post.

LEONARD

I'll get it .

1st MAN

Mister, don't leave us in here--Please, Suh!

LEONARD

I got it.

HARDY

Throw them the bar--And you come on, Honey.

LEONARD

Here, Fellows---Here the bar---Help yourselfs!

(Following HARDY and LEAH out)

We fool round with you, we get caught!

(Exit ALL THREE -- as LIGHTS FADE)

ACT II

Scene 6

TIME: An Hour Later

The moon is still up, but the sky shows patches of roving clouds, which, with the passage of time, will thicken forecasting rain.

The SLAVES, disturbed and anxious, are seated about in gloomy silence. After a moment, hearing SELENA approaching, they stir uneasily.

SELENA
(Off-Right, singing despairingly)
Got a bosom full of sorrow, and, Lawd, I'm comfortless,
Got a bosom full of sorrow, and, Lawd, I'm comfortless--
I feel like Hagar cast in the wilderness;
(Entering, she comes down to go out Down-Right.--
SINEY rises to follow her)

Nicey
(Arresting latter)
Let her 'lone, Siney.

Siney
I'm jes goin try once more to talk to her.

Nicey
It's too late for talk.

Sinćey
But she's so alone.

Nicey
Ain't nothin help her less'n them boys can rescue that poor chile;

Siney
Selena don't even know they's tryin, poor thing---

Jerry
Then it's high time somebody told her;

Amy
Sure better, 'fore she lose her mind.

Hannah
Tain't no use.

Jerry
How you talk!--Can't you see the fix she in?

Siney
Thas why I wanted to follow her--Though, like you say, Nicey; they done took all the heart out of her, and she'll never be no good till she see Leah---You all should-er seed her when Hardy come back from town and ghin her her money back! Seems like she jes knowed all wuz lost, and wilted right before my very eyes.--Hardy tried to tell her what him and Leonard was plannin. But I doubt if she heard a word he said.

Lee
She been hangin round out dere all night, waitin for the Cunnel.

Tilita
I speck she feel he's her last hope.

Julia
(After a moment)
She sure look bad. Just like some lost soul, prowlin round tween He'bem ' earf.

Betty
(Shivering)
She ghin me a cold chill!

Amy
Les don't put "bad mouth" on her.

Betty
I pity her too much for tha, Amy. But I can't hep thinkin.
(Going on, gloomily)
I laid on my pallet all night long last night, listenin to tha hound of McFee's howlin till jes 'fore day this mawnin.

Hannah
He sure did.

Betty
You hear it too?

Hannah
Deed I did. I didn't want to mention it myself, cause as you all know, it's one sign sure don't lie.

Amy
Have mercy, Jesus.

Betty
Death's round here all right--so close you can jes bout hear the rustlin of his dusty wings.

AMY
Don't say tha, Betty. I don't want to hear it--wid my boy out yonder!

JERRY
(Trying to stem the tide)
Leonard and Hardy goin be all right. You all jes lettin yourselves git downhearted cause everything look so 'ouliar an unsartin. But the night ain't dark as it used to be.

Sol
Howcome you say tha, Unk Jerry?

Jerry
You see them storm clouds gatherin up yonder?
(They all glance at the sky)

Lee
What bout em?

Jerry
Well---Now mind you all this ain't to git out....But while us settin heah actin like the world's comin to-er end, not bery many miles from here, I could put my finger on a Uprising!

Sol
Go on, Man. You don't mean it!

Jerry
You all know I ain't the man to pass no careless word.

Siney
(In awe)
When you hear this?

Jerry
John McFee brung the news this atternoon, when he come for the filly. He say hell's broke loose in Paducah.

Hannah
Do Jesus!

Jerry
Tween now n tomorrow us should git the straight of it. But one thing's sure. There's been bloodshed.

Sol
You reckon they got a chance?

Jerry
Can't tell yet. But they say they got white men in there helpin the cause.

Lee
White mens?

Jerry
Yeah. Like John Brown and his men, what they claim they hung last Xmas.

Amy
Nicey, you think there's sompen to this?

Nicey
Amy, you old enough to know the grapevine don't lie!

Lee
Go on, Unk Jerry--What else?

Jerry
Looks like they caught one of our folks---

Sol
I just knowed tha was comin!

Jerry
Thas where you wrong. They say he went to the gallows boastin--Told em xYou can hang me if you want to. But tain't goin stop the rest. Cause they'd done made up their mind to git rid of this heavy load, and when they got through wouldn't be a master left to pester nobody soul. Furthermore, they wuz gwine split up the land and the mules tween everybody, and do the same way bout the furniture of every Big House in the County.

Lee
Damn, I ought to be there!

Nicey
you drap that kind of talk! Time now to keep your mough shet and wait!

Jerry
Yeah, and 'member which side you on and jes be ready. This thing spread, us tear this Kingdom down!
(Silence)
Tilita
(Suddenly)
Lawd- a-mucy! There's the ca'iage!
(She runs across to look out, Up-Right)
Jerry
(Meanwhile, sprining up)
Teh ca'iages--They see us they figer us up to sompen!

Tilita
Too late to run. They's in the yard.

Jerry
(Commandingly in hushed tones)
Quick! through the barn. And be careful you don't make a sound---
(Catching LEE, as the others scurry up to disappear in barn)
Lee! Take care the team--'Fore they miss Leonard.
(Exit behind others)

LEE
I got yuh!

JEB
(Off-Right, shouting)
Leonard!

Lee
(Going)
Coming, Jeb!
(A moment later, Off-Right)
Evenin, Cunnel.
(Exit)

UPSON
(Entering with Hilliard,
He comes down midway and halts)
Wait, Hilliard---

Hilliard
What's the matter?

Upson
(Nauseated)
I feel like a dog at his vomit!
(Suddenly, sheilding
his mouth, he turns.
and goes out Up-Right)

Hilliard
(As latter retches behind
corner of fence)
You guzzled enough booze to sink a ship.

Jeb
(Appearing, he halts near
Upson)
Sir, can I get you some sedlitz powder?

Hilliard
Nevermind, Jeb. Go on to bed. He'll be all right.

Jeb
(Joining Hilliard, hesitantly)
I could make him a pot of coffee---?

Hilliard
It's an idea.
(JEB exits Down-Right

Upson
(Returning)
I shouldn't vexlet you persuade me to come back---

HILLIARD
The fresh air has done you good---

SELENA
(Entering swiftly, Down-Right,
she confronts the Colonel)
Whar my chile?

Upson
(Avoiding her)
Go away, Selena--Don't you see I'm sick?

Selena
(Cutting him off)
Why you come back without her? Why?

Upson
Go away, I say, and don't bother me now!

Selena
you got to tell me. They say she been sold! Tell me tain't so!

Upson
(Moving off)
The matter's not settled---

Selena
(Wildly)
Howmome tain't? What you done let em do with my chile?

Upson
She'll be all right, I tell you. There was nothing I could do at the moment---

Selena
(Going into hysteria)
But you promise me!

Upson
you're acting like a fool, Selena---

Selena
But you promise me faithfully---!

Upson
I must have more time----

Selena
I want my baby now!

Upson
Damn it, you know there's nothing I can do tonight!

Selena
(Wildly)
I want my baby!

Upson
you're trying my patience!

Selena
I want my baby--Oh, Aaron, gimme back my chile!

UPSON
(Trying to shake her of f)
Damn you! You want me to hurt you?
(Appealing to Hilliard)
See what you can do with her!

Hilliard
(Taking her)
Come, Selena---

Selena
He ghin me his word---

Hilliard
This is no time for that---

Selena
He ghin me his word, but he didn't mean it---
(Whirling on Upson)
What kind of man is you, treat me this a-way?

Upson
I've no sympathy for you when you carry on this way!

Selena
But you know tain't fair--I declare to Gawd!

Upson
Go to your cabin, and don't get besides yourself!

Selena
I'se titled to my chile--She all I got in this world!

Upson
She don't belong to me, and youknow that!

Selena
I got my rights too!

Upson
Damn you, I told you to hush--You got no rights--but what I choose to give you! You've known all along what to expect--and that goes for Leah! Now get out of my sight. At once! Before I pick up a stick and brain you!

Selena
(Her last illusion shattered)
So this what I get for my foolish faith. First you sell my chile. Then you put me in my place!
(Going)
Oh, woe is me! Woe ismy poor baby. Woe! Woe is all who put their trust in the proud and mighty in this cruel world!
(Exit Up-Right)

Hilliard
(Moved)
It wouldave been kinder had you put a bullet through her head!

UPSON

(Angrily)

Now don't you start on me!

Hilliard

(Coldly)

No. What's the use of my deceiving myself. You've broken faith with us all.

Upson

She got out of place and tried to bulldoze me. You saw yourself.

Hilliard

I thought you were a man of some pumpunction, Papa--All my life I believed that. But you're just a fraud!

Upson

Can I help it if your Ma took the bulls by the horns?

Hilliard

You leave Mama out of this!

Upson

Of course. You're determined to make me the goat!

Hilliard

(In a cold fury)

You taught us it was our duty to remember the Nigras as a defenseless lot. But like the men you pretend to despise, you're fine and dandy among your equals. But for the rights and feeling of the Nigras, the devil himself couldn't have a more criminal disregard!

Upson

No, Son---

Hilliard

It's tyranny!

Upson

You do me wrong, Son.

Hilliard

I know better, Sir. I should've tumbled the other day, when you professed to be so concerned about our own--! You've allowed this stinking system to split your conscience down the middle like a pig's foot!

Upson

We must draw the line somewhere, Boy!

Hilliard

You may. But I'm getting out--This very night!

UPSON
Don't play the fool, Son--You'll regret it!

Hilliard
(Going)
Like hell I will. I'm a full grown man, and I don't have to depend upon you, nor the sweat and blood of the Nigras.
(Exit Down-Right)

Upson
(In angry frustration)
By God! I don't see why I shouldn't welcome this talk of war--when a good sound defeat might absolve me of all responsibility.
(Hearing Lee singing, He EXITS Down-Right)

Lee
Strumpet, git way from mah door!

(Entering, he continues, as he prepares to water team--His actions involved in placing a trough between the well and the hole in the fence where it empties into the drinking trough beyond)
Take yoursef out-er mah face!
I brung you from home on mah weddin-day
But you tried to take mah place!----

(A LOUD CRASH resounds in the barn, startling him so that he releases the handle of the windlass, which isleft whirling as the pail descends uncoiling the rope, on it's way to the bottom. In a moment, he regains his bearings to run up and investigate. He starts into the barn, but immediately recoils, and begins yelling at the top of his voice in horror)
Sol! Unk Jerry! Hey! some of you all better come heah!

JERRY
(In the distance)
What is it, Lee?

Lee
Run heah quick!
(He turns away, groaning)
Lawd, Lawd....

Sol
(Running in)
What's the matter wid you, boy--Isyou crazy? yellin like this, this time o' night!--Anybody think you wuz bein murdered!

Lee

LEE
(Speechlessly, pointing into barn)
Look....!

Sol
(Infected by the other's terror, and stepping toward door gingerly)
What tiz...?
(Recoiling from sight within)
Great Gawd from He'bem!

Jerry
(Running in with several others at his heels)
What's going on heah?

Lee
Look what's hanging in the barn!

Jerry
(Urging others out of the way)
Move, you all---

Siney
(Entering with still others)
What is it, Lee?

Lee
Selena...

Sol
She done hung hersef!
(A great sigh goes up from CROWD, and they surge forward to see)

Jerry
(Suddenly in command)
Run, somebody. Tell the Cunnel! -- And, Sol, don't stand there, man. Hep me cut her down!
(He ducks within barn. SOL and two others following--Meanwhile, FANNY, runs off Down-Right)

Tilita
(Looking within)
Oh, this is awful! This is terrible!
(She turns away)

Siney
(Staring within)
Oh, the poor thing!
(Her voice is wailing)

Hannah
This is a sight to move the heart of Jesus!

Betty
(Sobbing)
I tried to tell you all--Now it's too late!

Jerry
(As they bear Selena's body out)
Git back, you all--Git out the way!

Sol
Whar we goin put her?

Jerry
The platform--I reckon----
(They bear her body down)

Crowd
(Looking on)
Oh, what a pity!
It's a shame; a dirty shame!

Siney
(Groaning)
Lawd, have mercy!

Sol
(As Jerry hesitates at platform, in a quandry as to how to complete their task--)
you go up the step!
(They place body on platform)
Amy
(At Selena's feet arranging her skirt)
Dey broke your heart, ppor soul--Dey took all you had, den cast you way!

LEONARD
(Appearing to halt, Up-Right)
What's up?

Tilita
(Joining him)
Oh, you back---?

Leonard
What's the matter?

Tilita
Did you all git Leah?

Leonard
Yeah---

Tilita
Oh, my Gawd! Wait'll she hear what's happened!

LEONARD
What--Tilita?

Tilita
Selena jes hung hersef!

Leonard
(Yelling spontaneously)
Hardy!

Tilita
(To Betty)
Ma--Leah's back!

Betty
Where?

Tilita
Out there!

Hannah
And her Ma gone--Oh, this is terrible!

Siney
Selena wouldn't listen!

Hardy
(Appearing Up -Right)
What's the trouble?

Leonard
Selena, Man--done hung hersef--

Leah
(Entering)
What's that---?

Hardy
(Intercepting her)
Get back, Leah. Don't come out here---

Leah
(Wildly)
Oh, get away, Hardy! I heard what he said--Let me go!
(He releases her and as the CROWD parts she runs across to fall on upper step beside her mother's body)
Oh, Mama! Mama!...Oh, what've they done to you? Speak to me!...Oh, tell me you're all right!--Oh, God! Oh, Jesus me!
(Sobbing, she clutches the dead woman in her arms and remains prostrate)

Hardy
How did it happen?

Lee
She climbed up on the rafter in the barn, and jes throwed herself down, I reckon--I was right there by the well.

fixin to water the team. When, kerblamb! I heard the crash. -- I didn't know what to figure at first. Then I rand up and looked, and there she was--one poor terrible sight I can tell you all--I couldn't think of nothin but start yelling for help.

Sol
It's a pity you didn't have sense nuff to cut the rope.

Jerry
She might-er been all right, hadn't been for tha cross-piece--Thas what held her when the beam broke---

Upson
(Entering--with Hilliard at his heels)
Where is she?
(The GROUP falls back in silence, revealing Leah bowed over the body, and he recoils at sight of her)
You---here? (Fanny enters)

(Leah, sobbing, ignores him)
(MAHALIA enters)

Hilliard
(To Hardy)
How did she get out?

Hardy
I helped her.

Mahalia
(To Hardy, sharply)
And you've the audacity to admit it?

Hardy
(Belligerently)
Old Miss, she didn't belong to you anymore!

Hilliard
But don't you know you'll be arrested for man stealing?

Hardy
(Surly)
Somebody had to do something.
(ADELAIDE enters)

Mahalia
(Seeing Adelaide--Sharply)
What're you doing here inspite of my orders!

Adelaide
(Stubbornly joining her father)
I want to see----
(To Upson)
Is she really dead--?

Upson

Upson
(Hollowly)
Yes...There's nothing more we can do to her now!

Adelaide
(Turning in sudden tears)
Oh, Mama--This is horrible!

Upson
She shouldn't've done it. She should've had more trust!

Mahalia
(Glancing at Crowd)
She did this out of malice. She's thrown away her chance for salvation just to punish me!
(THE CROWD GROANS)

Leah
(Aroused, she turns in grief and indignation)
you ought to be ashamed, Old Miss--
(Choking back a sob)
You ought to go somewhere and hang your head and cry!

Mahalia
(Defensively)
It was wrong of her and uncalled for, a wicked and unforgivable thing in the sight of God!

Leah
(Her feelings outraged)
If that's so then why can't you leave her to Him? Why do you judge and try to slander and condemn her?--you've had your revenge! or do you think you can save face before everybody, when between you
(Indicating Upson)
two you drove her to it?--Yet, you got the nerve to call her wicked--It's a wonder God don't strike you dead!

Mahalia
It was spite work!---

Leah
(Furious)
What do you call the pitiless way you sold me? What about
(indicating the Colonel again)
him and the way he dishonored her, and then broke his word, knowing she was innnocent and had nobody else in the world to help her?--But that wzs all right. She was a mother like you, a human being with feelings like everyone else. But to you all she was just a pair of hands, a thing beholden from birth to your passing whims. Cause you've got the power...you all straddle the world with your whip in one hand and your gun in the other, and justice isno more to you than a salty tear on the cheeks of those you wrong----

Mahalia
Stop her mouth, Aaron--Don't you see what she's up to?

Leah
Sure. You're scared now. You know you stole us like bandits, and you hold us with no better right. So you're scared I'm going to stir everybody up. But don't worry. There's nothing I need to say which the future won't take good care of---Hang that in your shed for curing----

(THUNDER SOUNDS far off, portentuously)

Mahalia
(Going)
I'll see you hung for this---Come, Adelaide.
(Exit with Adelaide, Down-Right)

Leah
(Shouting after her)
Don't deceive yourself!
(Turning to Upson)
But I guess you're ready to turn me in. Well, it's all right, too, with me. I can wait. For as sure as you hear that thunder grumbling in the sky, our day will come. If there's a merciful God, it will, and if I'm not badly mistaken, I'll live to see it! Now do what you please with me. I don't care!

Upson
(Sighing)
Go your way, Leah, if you can.
(Going)
Maybe someday you'll learn, as has been said: No man can live in the midsts of evil and not be touched.
(Exit Down-Right)

Hilliard
(After a moment, turning to Harry)
you'd better take Selena to her cabin and wake her---
(To Hardy)
And you'd better come along to the house. I'll give you your papers.

Hardy
Do you mean you're setting me free?

Hilliard
Yes. You can't stay here without getting yourself hung--And perhaps you can find a way across the river with Leah. It may be you can bring her a little of the happiness she never found here--Meantime, I'll see what can be done to redeem her---
(Going)
Goodbye, Leah.

Leah
Goodbye, Hilliard, and may God bless you!
(Exit Hilliard Down-Ri

HARDY
(Following him)
I'll be right back, Honey.

(Exit Down-Right)

Jerry
(Lifting song, as he and others remove corpse from platform)
There is a balm in Gilead
To make the wounded whole...
(The Others join in)
There is a balm in Gilead
To heal the sin-sick soul!

Oh, if you can't pray like Peter,
If you can't preach like Paul,
Go home and tell your neighbor
He died to free us all!

(Bearing the dead woman out, their voices ring over the Dells, as the Curtain Falls)

CURTAIN